

**Texturalism and Performance –  
Adorno's Theory of Truth**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis establishes a new reading of Adorno's theory of truth. I argue that Adorno posits truth as being mutually constituted by dialectical philosophical texts, and the agent's cognitive engagement and 'performance' of these texts. This reading is founded on an interpretation of Adorno as a transcendental philosopher, who grounds the transcendental necessity of concepts in the requirements of self-preservation. The agent's performative interaction with the text is held to provide access to truth by virtue of interfering with the conceptual mediation of the agent's experience.

I go on to argue that this conception of truth is also at play in Adorno's philosophy of art. I claim that the artwork, for Adorno, presents a dialectically constituted whole which, when performatively engaged with by the agent, disrupts the conceptual mediation of his or her experience, and provides access to the truth. While I show that Adorno considers his theory of truth content for art and philosophy to be unified, I also demonstrate that Adorno nonetheless maintains the differentiation between art and philosophy. I do this by providing a new interpretation of the relationship which Adorno draws between aesthetic autonomy and heteronomy.

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For Lauren

## Introduction

Theodor Adorno was a German philosopher. He was also a Marxist, Jew, aesthetician and sociologist, among other things. It is perhaps a measure of the confusion that reigns in Adorno scholarship that these latter labels are often each held to be standpoints, from which Adorno's philosophy can either be explained and criticized (most notably as a form of Marxism), or disregarded entirely (most notably as a contribution to aesthetics). The central commitment of this thesis is to the centrality of Adorno's being a *philosopher*. I take Adorno to be engaged in asking certain determinate philosophical questions, and engaged in the pursuit of certain determinate answers to those questions. This pursuit comes before any putative commitments Adorno may have – be they Marxist or not. Adorno's project is, I contend, an epistemological one, and is assessable only insofar as it succeeds or fails in this endeavor.<sup>1</sup>

No less important than Adorno's being a philosopher, is his being a *German* philosopher. German not only by birth, but by the intellectual tradition with which he deals. As has been demonstrated by O'Connor in *Adorno's Negative Dialectics*, Adorno is a recognizably transcendental philosopher who, drawing heavily on Kant and Hegel, produces an account of the transcendental grounds of experience. In what I believe to be an addition to O'Connor's account (or at least a change in emphasis), I demonstrate that Adorno also draws heavily on another German philosopher in developing this account of experience – namely, Karl Marx.

However, this engagement with Marx is not a commitment to any political programme of Marxism (if Marx can be taken to have had such a thing). Nor is it a position which can be criticized from the point of view of concrete political praxis. Rather, it is Adorno's materialism which represents his fidelity to Marx's legacy. Concealed by the uniformly Kantian-cum-Hegelian tenor of Adorno's work is the fact that Adorno's theory of experience is not transcendental *simpliciter*. Rather it is a theory of experience according to which the conditions of the possibility of experience are contingent on material practices. Concepts are simultaneously transcendently

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<sup>1</sup> This assertion may seem odd in light of Adorno's *Against Epistemology*, the title of which implies Adorno's rejection of epistemology. However, *Against Epistemology* is an argument against undialectical epistemologies which contain 'first philosophy' in the form of explanatorily basic foundations, and which presume concepts are adequate to objects. I do not take Adorno to be opposed to epistemological questions (of what there is to know, what it means to know something, etc.), only to undialectical ways of *answering* these questions. Adorno himself asserts this – 'Epistemology is true as long as it accounts for the impossibility of its own beginning and lets itself be driven at every stage by its inadequacy to the things themselves.' (Adorno 1985: 25). Adorno's project is *epistemology*, then, insofar as it addresses epistemological questions.

necessary for, contingent on, and pragmatically engaged with the agent's form of life.

The aim of this thesis will be to explain and develop Adorno's theory of truth. I will concern myself with both what Adorno takes the true to be and, more significantly, how he takes the true to be accessible. I will attempt to demonstrate that Adorno's understanding of the nature of philosophical truth is highly idiosyncratic and unusual. In a novel reading, I will show that Adorno does not understand the true as being captured by the kind of dialectical analysis one finds in *Negative Dialectics* or *Aesthetic Theory*. Rather, the true is accessed by virtue of the agent's internalization of and performative engagement with these dialectical texts.<sup>2</sup> The truth is reducible neither to the text, nor to the agent – but rather to the product of a dialectical interplay of the two. I term this position 'texturalism'.

To my knowledge, outside of O'Connor's recognition that false consciousness cannot be subverted merely by theoretical knowledge, but also a praxis or 'movement of consciousness' (O'Connor 2000: 91), and Menke's (1998) treatment of Adorno's *aesthetics* as providing an experiential critique of reason, this feature of Adorno's general philosophical account has not been properly recognized nor thoroughly elaborated. Nor have the full consequences of this feature of Adorno's account been displayed: through examining the grounds of the possibility of Adorno's texturalism, a good deal of the subterranean structure of Adorno's account is revealed. Moreover, it also sharpens Adorno's critique of conventional theories of truth, and the differentiation between Adorno's position and conventional theories of truth.

This done, I will then move to establish a second new reading of Adorno. This will consist in taking Adorno's theory of philosophical truth content to apply also to Adorno's theory of aesthetic truth content. As is well known, Adorno took art to be cognitive, and claimed that the criterion of art's authenticity was its being true. I will demonstrate that this conception of art's truth must in fact be seen as unified with Adorno's conception of philosophical truth. There will, however, be important points of differentiation which prevent Adorno's account, on my interpretation, from merely subsuming art under the category of philosophy.

I have not intended this dissertation to be wholly a historical account of Adorno's views, nor have I intended it to be wholly novel. Quite apart from any flaws we may find in Adorno's work, we also find reasonably large *blank* expanses in his philosophy, where Adorno has given little definition to the specific mechanisms, interconnections and views he may have posited, drawn or held. This becomes increasingly pronounced the deeper, as it were, one delves into Adorno's work. Given Adorno's justified aversion

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<sup>2</sup> This 'performativity' is not the Austinian variety – more detail on this will be given in Chapter 3.



to foundational or 'first' philosophy, this is scarcely surprising. However, it is not *always* excusable. Many of these blank expanses both demand and hold out the promise of interpretive activity which moves beyond mere exegesis. I have felt the need at several points in this dissertation to move beyond adding clarity to, or chancing inferences about, Adorno's intended philosophical work. I have felt obliged to add philosophical content in areas which Adorno did not address, and about which he gave little guidance. I have done this with the intention of remaining true to, or shoring up, Adorno's established philosophical practices and positions.

I have tried to indicate where my thought has become especially speculative, and where Adorno's voice has become sufficiently quiet as to require speculation. However, it is worth pointing out that much of Chapter 3 and 4 hovers between grounded inference and original work.

It is worth pointing out more generally that the reading of Adorno found in this dissertation is constructed not with a view to exhaustive fidelity to and inclusion of every facet of Adorno's thought. Neither space nor time permit this. As such, there are a number of areas of Adorno's work which are not represented. For example, Adorno is often happy to lay considerable explanatory weight on Freud's work, particularly in his earlier work. I do not find this area of his work particularly relevant to my project, and nor do I find it compelling on its own terms. Freud does not appear in this dissertation – and psychology in general scarcely at all. I do not doubt that some of my aims, or the emphases I choose to lay on the philosophical underpinnings of those aims, may differ from Adorno. But my project is not to reiterate Adorno's work, but to illuminate what I take to be a central and underappreciated facet of Adorno's thought, and work with his philosophy in such a way as to bring it to light and give it an explicit, coherent and plausible philosophical foundation. It is in this spirit of 'working with' Adorno's philosophy towards its own goals, rather than merely explicating, or dismissively moving away from it, that this dissertation should be understood.

It is this attempt to work with Adorno, and make explicit and determinate that which is often implicit or unsaid which explains the occasionally laborious air of the first two Chapters. I have found that the interpretation given in Chapters 3 and 4 is sufficiently unusual as to demand an exhaustive outlay of what I take to be the grounds for this interpretation. As such, the first two Chapters occasionally take a more long-winded approach than seems strictly necessary at the time. The incessant stipulations and arguments from elimination, however, are intended to pre-emptively close off problems which may occur in the later Chapters, as well as make fully explicit the various interpretive decisions which underpin my treatment of Adorno.

As the endpoint of this dissertation is a consideration of Adorno's aesthetic

thought as it relates to Adorno's philosophy of truth, I found taking an interpretive path through the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory* most expedient in view of the limited word count. Relatedly, as this consideration of Adorno's aesthetics is almost wholly methodological, Adorno's highly accomplished aesthetic criticism is almost wholly unconsidered. This omission is at least partly rectified in the appendix, where I demonstrate Adorno's application of the theory of aesthetic truth-content to Beethoven.

A final disclaimer. As is well known, Adorno's work has been translated often, but not often translated well. While this difficulty can be overstressed, in the case of Ashton's treatment of *Negative Dialectics* it can be quite severe. As a result, all page numbers given in reference to *Negative Dialectics* are doubled, the first being the reference in Ashton's translation, the second giving the reference in Adorno's *Gesammelte Schriften*. All quotations from *Negative Dialectics* which appear in this work in English are from Ashton's translation, adapted with reference to the original German where appropriate.

## **1. – Conceptual Mediation and Necessity**

### **1.1 Introductory Stipulations**

Adorno's treatment of truth, on my interpretation across the next four Chapters, is idiosyncratic enough to necessitate a number of stipulations, in order to prevent misunderstanding. The conventional argot of epistemology does not comfortably map onto Adorno's philosophy. This is due in no small part to the holistic theory of falsity which I expound in Chapter 2. As a consequence of this holistic theory of falsity, Adorno can be understood to have a pluralistic theory of truth, insofar as there a number of ways for a sentence to be counted as 'true'. However, with the exception of a single privileged standard of truth (access to the non-identical), these other forms of truth are posited as being ultimately false.

This obviously complicates the picture somewhat. Unless otherwise indicated, any reference to 'the true' or 'truth' in this work should be taken to be referring to the unqualifiedly true, as opposed to any of the other, ultimately false, forms of truth Adorno's philosophy allows.

A further stipulation must be made concerning 'the true' and 'truth'. As had already been noted, all references to the true will be taken to be references to the unqualifiedly true which escapes Adorno's holistic theory of falsity. However, due to an ontological quirk of Adorno's position, we must differentiate between 'truth' and 'the true'. 'The true' is stipulated to refer to the non-identical, which bears its truth whether or not it is expressed. 'Truth', by contrast, is stipulated to refer to the cognitive access to the true. The reasons for truth being stipulated to be a property of an agent's cognition, rather than propositions or texts, are numerous, and detailed in Chapter 3.

### **1.2. The status of the true**

As noted, the main focus of this dissertation will be Adorno's theory of the manner in which truth is instantiated in philosophy and art. In order for this examination to begin, it is important to determine the status of the true itself. In the present case, I will concern myself with what Adorno considers the true (in the sense already explained)— namely, the non-identical. The non-identical is, according to Adorno, the real object of any philosophical investigation or artwork. As will become increasingly clear in the course of this dissertation, Adorno takes all other forms of truth (for example, empirical assertions) to be problematized by virtue of the falsifying nature of concepts.

Adorno takes all experience to be conceptually mediated (proof of this is given below). All concepts that mediate experience or that are employed theoretically,

necessarily result in falsification. The precise reason for this will be explained later on. For now, it suffices to note that Adorno takes these concepts to be false by virtue of their taking part in what he variously terms 'enlightenment thinking' or 'identity thinking' (DE: 23, ND : 154 / 157). The distinctive feature of this 'identity thinking' is that the agent takes the concept to exhaust its object, and is thereby ignorant of those properties of the object which are not identical with the concept applied to it.

The upshot of this is that all epistemological activity is instantly problematized. As all theoretical activity (and indeed, all experience, according to Adorno) takes place by virtue of concepts, which are inherently falsifying, it would seem that any statement of truth is impossible. Adorno endorses this picture, and denies that any positive statement of the truth is possible (ND: 145 / 148).

The non-identical is the only exception to this gloomy picture. The non-identical is taken to be constitutively non-conceptual (*begrifflos*). Its non-conceptuality is not merely a failure to engage with or be germane to concepts. However, it is constitutively uncapturable by concepts. Moreover, this non-conceptuality is in fact constituted as a *critique* of conceptuality.<sup>3</sup> Rather than simply being non-conceptual nonsense with no relevance to conceptuality, it in fact functions as a critique of conceptuality itself. The non-conceptual is intended to demonstrate the falsifying nature of conceptuality.

All of the above will have to be accommodated by my reading of Adorno's theory of the true. It will be the aim of this dissertation to both accommodate and theoretically ground these assertions of Adorno's concerning truth and the non-identical. It is important to reiterate at this point that the 'true' for Adorno can be taken to be co-extensive with the 'non-identical'. As such, this attempt to discern Adorno's theory of the true, and his theory of the truth's instantiation, will result in an attempt to discern Adorno's theory of the non-identical and his theory of the non-identical's instantiation.

This being the case, we re-encounter the problem that we need to establish what the true is, in order to begin to understand the manner in which the truth is instantiated. While we have established what the non-identical's *function* is (a non-conceptual critique of conceptuality), we have yet to establish the non-identical's *ontological status*.

I interpret the non-identical as a dialectical entity internal to thought, which appears at any point where an internally contradictory system of thought and the object of that thought interact. As such, the non-identical is not constituted by any property of

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<sup>3</sup> 'The nonidentical is not to be obtained directly, as something positive on its part, nor is it obtainable by a negation of the negative [...] Its only positive side would be criticism, determinate negation; it would not be a circumventing result with a happy grasp on affirmation.' (ND: 158 – 159 / 161)

an object itself – rather, it is an itinerant problematic internal to thought. It is revealed by confronting the system of thought with that object of thought which will make explicit the internally contradictory nature of that thought. If, then, a system of thought is internally contradictory in its treatment of, say, labour then it is the thorough dialectical confrontation of that system of thought and the object of labour which will produce the non-identical. The non-identical will consist in the system of thought's production, by its own principle, of a collapse in its concepts. The non-identical, then, will be the combination of the object and the concept's insufficiency, displayed through dialectical philosophy.

However, this non-identity is not attributable to a property of *the object 'labour' simpliciter*. By this I mean that the non-identity which arises is not *simply* the fact that the object 'labour' has certain properties not yet cognized by the concept of labour. Rather, it is the *interaction* of the object labour and the obtaining system of thought which gives rise to and results in non-identity. Non-identity, then, is a dynamic existent mutually constituted by a given object and an obtaining system of thought. Non-identity must be understood as being mutually constituted by the object and the concept, just because given certain corrections, the system of thought can accommodate and resolve the arising contradictions, and the given object will cease to have a non-identical aspect.

In brief, then, this reading understands the non-identical to be the confrontation of a system of thought with an object it cannot, for reasons of internal contradiction, subsume.<sup>4</sup> This 'confrontation' is not a product of conventional cognition but must be engineered by dialectics. As such, non-identity cannot be identified merely with the object, nor with the subject – it is brought into being in the interaction of the two.

It is this interpretation of the non-identical that I will employ. For the present, I will simply stipulate that the non-identical meets this account. Exegetical support for this reading will be given in the course of this dissertation. I will also attempt to demonstrate the benefits of adopting this reading, by showing the beneficial consequences it has for the comprehension of a great number of Adorno's methodological remarks.

### **1.3. Adorno's Theory of Experience**

I have stipulated, then, that the non-identical is not a property of an object in itself, but rather an emergent entity which is produced by the interaction of a system of conceptual thought and an object of thought. Attempting to determine Adorno's theory

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<sup>4</sup> So as not to anticipate the analysis in Chapter 2, I have here used the term 'system of thought' for what will be later termed a 'conceptual array'.

of truth thus entails fixing the precise nature of the mechanism by which one's system of thought is forced into a confrontation with its own insufficiency. I want to first examine Adorno's understanding of the medium in which this confrontation must take place – namely, experience.

Adorno takes all experience to be conceptually mediated. Adorno also holds that the structure of this conceptual mediation develops over time.<sup>5</sup> Establishing this will be the task of this Chapter. Once we have established that access to the non-identical is necessarily conceptually mediated, we will need to understand precisely what the *nature* of the concept is. This will be the task of the next Chapter. A fair amount of the present Chapter is intended to facilitate this later discussion – as such, the present examination of Adorno's theory of experience will touch on areas that will not, at this point, seem strictly relevant. However, they are of essential importance in the later discussion.

As I have said, then, I hold that Adorno takes perception to be necessarily conceptually mediated. In *Negative Dialectics*, we have the following examples of this :

Mental objectivity corresponds to the moment of the immediacy of vision. Pre-shaped in itself, it can be viewed like things of the senses [...] Beneath the ideating view, the mediation which had congealed in the apparent immediacy of spirit is at work. (ND: 82 / 89-90, translation modified)

Here we see Adorno employing the perceptual as an analogue to the objectivity of thought ('Mental objectivity'). What makes these analogues of one another is that in each case mediation congeals in apparent immediacy. In other words, the immediacy of experience is in fact constituted by mediation – it is preformed.

Coming to light in this is the fact that subjectification and reification do not merely diverge. They are correlates [...] The reduction of the object to pure material, which precedes all subjective synthesis as its necessary condition, sucks the object's own dynamics out of it: it is disqualified, immobilized, and robbed of whatever would allow motion to be predicated at all [...] The material however, divested of its dynamics, is not absolutely immediate –

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<sup>5</sup> While this is a theory of experience *simpliciter* for Adorno, I will often, in the course of establishing this, need to have reference to examples of *perceptual* experience. For economy, rather than continually point out that the account of perceptual experience is intended to also apply to experience *simpliciter*, I will instead refer to 'perception'. Reference to 'perception', then, should be taken as reference not merely to perception, but to the perceptual element of experience in general.

despite its appearance of absolute concretion it is mediated by abstraction, impaled as it were from the first. (ND: 91 / 98, translation modified)

Here Adorno deals with the tendency of reification to obscure the object's 'own dynamics' (i.e., its dialectical nature) by reducing it to 'mere material'. As such, the object appears to the consciousness as mere immediacy. However, Adorno denies that such a reduction could ever be successful. This is because, he claims, the object is 'impaled, as it were, from the first' by 'abstraction' (*Abstraktion*) which mediates it. Adorno is claiming that all experience of objects are constituted by conceptual abstraction, no matter how immediate they appear.

Because entity is not immediate, because it is only through the concept, we should begin with the concept, not with the mere datum. (ND: 153 / 156)

Finally, Adorno makes the necessity of the concept for epistemological access to the object very bald in this extract. The 'mere datum', according to Adorno, cannot be a starting point for comprehension of 'entity' (*das Seiende*). Rather, we must begin with the concept, as entity is 'only through the concept'. This demonstrates that conceptuality is, if you like, epistemologically primary. Any attempt to circumvent the concept and deal with the 'mere datum' is, Adorno claims, impossible.

While these extracts do serve as exegetical support for Adorno's holding a theory of experience as necessarily conceptually mediated, I intend to further demonstrate Adorno's commitment to this theory of experience by extrapolating from his commitments a somewhat curious analogue of Kant's Transcendental Deduction.

#### **1.4. Adorno's Deduction**

I intend to use consideration of Kant's general position on the conceptuality of experience as a framing device – in order to throw into relief, and bring out the oddity, of Adorno's position. Consequently, my description of Kant will be in the most general terms possible, and insensitive to any given exegetical controversies.

Construed roughly, Kant's Transcendental Deduction argues that the conceptual (categorical) mediation of experience is absolutely necessary for the experience of finite beings. Kant predicates this necessity on the transcendental unity of apperception, and the continuity of experience. In order to unify the 'I' of each discrete experience into a temporally enduring 'I' which recognizes itself across time (or space), Kant argues, one must have the faculty of unifying each qualitatively distinct impression via a judgement (Ward 2006: 55). These judgements are effected

via any one of the basic forms of judgement (outlined in the Metaphysical Deduction). Each of these forms has a categorial counterpart, which mediates and makes possible unified, continuous experience (Ward 2006: 50, 53 - 56). The continuity of temporal experience is necessarily conceptually mediated. If the content of this experience (the phenomena) could not be mediated by these categories, it therefore could not be experienced; it could not be unified across time, and hence the constitutive unity of apperception could not be achieved. From this rather rough and ready sketch of Kant's position, we can draw two key points. First, the nature of the necessity of the conceptual mediation is transparently absolute – in the absence of conceptual mediation, experience itself is impossible. Secondly – and this point will become relevant at the beginning of the next Chapter – Kant's phenomenal ontology is strictly limited by the transcendental conditions on one's experiencing this ontology. Put differently, by virtue of his transcendental argument Kant takes himself to have demonstrated that any phenomenal existent which cannot conform to the categories is thereby not a phenomenal existent. In this way, the existence of phenomena as yet unperceived due to their requiring some putative different categorial structure in order to be perceived is nonsensical.<sup>6</sup>

For Kant, then, conceptuality is necessary for the unification and continuity of experience, and non-conceptual experience is impossible.<sup>7</sup>

Adorno's putative analogue with this Transcendental Deduction is so unusual precisely because he does not hold *both* of these claims. While he holds that conceptuality is necessary for experience, he also accepts that non-conceptual experience is possible. As should be apparent, in order to prevent this from being merely a contradiction, Adorno is obliged to finesse the meaning of the terms employed. Adorno does this by finessing the meaning of the term 'experience' in each of these two claims, as well as modifying the force of the necessity of the conceptuality of experience. To anticipate, Adorno does this by translating Kant's demonstration out of the transcendental and into the *pragmatic*. As I hope to demonstrate, Adorno holds the conceptuality of perception as pragmatically necessary and, moreover, pragmatically motivated, as opposed to deriving from any transcendental condition on the nature of any possible experience. Similarly, an experience which is not conceptually mediated is held to be possible by Adorno, I will show, but *pragmatically* unsustainable. Not least significant in this difference from Kant will be Adorno's

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<sup>6</sup> '[W]e then say that the conditions for the *possibility of experience* are such as simultaneously conditions for the *possibility of objects of experience*' (Kant 1996: 228).

<sup>7</sup> This non-conceptuality being construed as either incompatibility with our categories, or compatibility with some putative category different to our own (a possibility Kant rejects, of course, in the Metaphysical Deduction).



positing of concepts as not transcendentally necessary, nor intrinsically truthful, but as products of self-interest. In order to begin establishing this reading of Adorno as plausible, we must make reference to both *Negative Dialectics* and, more extensively, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

Before I begin doing this, however, I will stipulate the meaning of a number of terms I will employ. Throughout this thesis, I will frequently refer to 'self-interest', 'self-preservation' and the 'pragmatic' grounds for the formation of concepts. By 'self-preservation' I refer to the agent's ongoing attempt to maintain the existence of his self, that self being construed as not merely physical, but also as bounded psychological agency. 'Self-interest' is defined as those requirements germane to the maintenance of the self as just defined. The 'pragmatic' grounds for the formation of concepts, and so on, are constituted by the way in which the requirements of self-interest interact with and are guided by the world.

That Adorno held that the conceptuality of experience was necessary is clear, as was shown earlier in section 1.3. However, perhaps the most striking formulation of this thought occurs in *Negative Dialectics*, where Adorno asserts '[w]ithout concepts, that experience [individual experience] would lack continuity' (ND: 46 / 56). This assertion is so striking precisely because of its strong Kantian tenor. Adorno here asserts that conceptuality is essential for the presence of experiential continuity. Adorno would appear to be following Kant in asserting that non-conceptual experience is impossible, due to its inherent discontinuity. Such discontinuity, Kant argues, precludes the formation of a self in which the experience could take place. In Adorno's telling employment of the broadly Kantian term 'continuity', then, we might expect that Adorno is in straightforward agreement with Kant's Transcendental Deduction. However, this interpretation is frustrated by the fact that Adorno does not equate the continuity of experience with its possibility. Adorno allows for the possibility of non-conceptual (and *ex hypothesi* discontinuous) experience.

### **1.5. Non-conceptual Experience**

Characteristically, Adorno does not simply assert that non-conceptual experience is possible (indeed, he does not directly address the present topic of enquiry at all). Happily, while Adorno does not directly address the possibility of non-conceptual experience, he *does* spend a great deal of time in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in attempting to outline the nature and genesis of conceptuality. It is my position that the non-conceptual experience which Adorno allows is described in this account in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Adorno alleges that conceptuality originated in a primal experience of terror, caused by man's inability to comprehend his immediate

surroundings ('the real preponderance of nature in the weak psyches of primitive people' ((DE: 11)). I want to argue that this 'terror' is in fact not merely a subjective 'taking fright', but is rather an experience of helplessness deriving from a completely non-conceptual epistemological standpoint.

I will defend this interpretation in two ways. First, I will demonstrate that Adorno holds that this original experience *occasions* the formation of concepts. From this, I will be able to show that a full conceptual array is evidently not innate, nor necessary for experience according to Adorno (given the simple fact that the concepts that constitute such an array were not all present in the experience which occasioned their formation). However, this will have the problem for my interpretation that it could still be the case that while *some* of the concepts constitutive of experience were not present in that original terror, being formed subsequently, some other, minimal set was. In order to shore up the idea that this original terror was completely non-conceptual, then, I will consider Adorno's account of the emergence of conceptuality as it relates to what he terms the transition 'from tautology into language' (DE: 11).

Once these two lines of argument are concluded, I hope to have demonstrated, or at least made plausible, that Adorno allows for a non-conceptual form of experience. The importance of this will be not merely to demonstrate the difference between Adorno and Kant. Rather it will throw into relief the problem (broached in the next Chapter) of the origin and subsequent nature of concepts and, by extension, the possible nature of the non-identical (which must be accessed by means of concepts).

### **1.6 Occasioning Concepts**

This original terror, the 'noonday panic fear in which nature appeared as all-powerful' (DE: 22) was overcome by the native's beginning to '[fix...] the transcendence of the unknown in relation to the known' (DE: 10). This fixing of the transcendence amounts to an arbitrary determination of an epistemological mode (which I will show to be incomprehensible in virtue of being discontinuous), such that the native is capable both of reducing his feeling of impotence and of being able to secure the practical necessities for a being of his sort. This can be shown in the following -

Of course, mental representation is only an instrument. In thought, human beings distance themselves from nature in order to arrange it in such a way that it can be mastered. Like the material tool which, as a thing, is held fast as that thing in different situations and thereby separates the world, as something chaotic, multiple and disparate, from that which is known, single and identical, so the concept is the idea-tool which fits into things at the very

point from which one can take hold of them. (DE: 31).

The 'transcendence of the unknown' (DE: 10) is worked by the idea-tool, such that it becomes reduced to the 'known, single and identical' (DE: 31). It would appear that in the above quote, Adorno is describing precisely what the process of fixing the transcendence amounted to – in describing the operation of the 'idea-tool', he describes a transition from the chaotic to the known and unified. This transition is effected by the concept. Already here we have support for the idea that the use of concepts was an emergent, rather than innate, or transcendently necessary for any experience whatsoever, practice. Of course, for a transcendence to be 'fixed' it must have been at some point unfixed. Given that the use of concepts effects the 'fixing', the unfixed state, it would seem, must have been not mediated by concepts.

In the above quote we also have Adorno's key idea that the concept is not created in order to model reality, but rather to master it. This is most bluntly expressed in Adorno's reduction of the concept to an 'idea-tool', with which one becomes able to reduce the world from a state of being 'chaotic, multiple and disparate' to being 'known, single and identical'. As such, we can see that the concept is oriented not towards truth, but rather domination of one's environment (so 'it can be mastered'). Of course, this does not exclude the possibility that, in being so dominating, the concept may model truth as well (the conceptual structure required for domination being equivalent to that required from truth). As set out in section 1.1, Adorno has a number of levels of truth. Confining discussion to consideration of the unqualifiedly true, it is clear that Adorno does *not* think that conventional concepts are true in this sense.<sup>8</sup> This will receive support in Chapter 2. However, there are 'lesser' forms of truth which conventional statements (like 'grass is green') can bear, despite being ultimately false. This receives further explanation in Chapter 3.

We have yet to show that the concepts that constitute a 'known, single and identical' experiential world out of a 'chaotic, multiple and disparate' one are not innate or unqualifiedly transcendently necessary. To do this, we will have to return to Adorno's account of the generation of conceptual dichotomies. A strong example of

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<sup>8</sup> The following are some examples of Adorno's rejecting the possibility of concepts truthfully modelling the world. 'The concept – the organon of thinking, and yet the wall between thinking and the thought – negates that yearning. Philosophy can neither circumvent such negation nor submit to it. It must strive, by way of the concept, to transcend the concept.' (ND: 15 / 27). '*While doing violence to the object of its syntheses*, our thinking heeds a potential that waits in the object' (ND: 19/ 30-31, emphasis mine). 'As the experience of what has come into being in things which supposedly merely are, essence perception would be the almost diametrical opposite of the end it is used for. Rather than a faithful acceptance of Being, it would be its critique: rather than a sense of the thing's identity with its concept, it would be an awareness of the break between them.' (ND: 82 / 89-90).

this account of conceptual generation occurs early on in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. After describing the experience of 'terror' for the native, and the ensuing process of 'fixing the transcendence', Adorno asserts that

The cry of terror called forth by the unfamiliar becomes its name [...] The doubling of nature into appearance and essence, effect and force [...] springs from human fear. (DE: 10).

Here we have further support for the idea that primal fear of nature (the 'terror' earlier referred to) occasions the formation of concepts. Two of the most basic conceptual dichotomies, between appearance and essence, and cause and effect ('effect and force') are held to '[spring] from human fear'. They spring *from* this fear, rather than being the condition of the possibility of any experience (fearful or not) at all. Adorno appears to assert, then, that prior to, and during this fearful encounter with nature, the categories of cause and effect and 'appearance and essence' were absent. Presumably, this absence is responsible for the epistemological weakness which allows 'the real preponderance of nature in the weak psyches of primitive people' (DE: 10 -11). We have here a clear example of the conceptless confrontation of the subject with the object giving rise to basic concepts. This would appear to lend support to the idea that this form of experience prior to the emergence was bereft of concepts.

However, even granting my reading of the above material, I have not yet provided adequate support for this interpretation. All that I have shown is that *some* conceptual categories are emergent, rather than innate or transcendently necessary. This is not inconsistent with the claim that all experience is conceptually mediated. We could understand experience as mediated by some set of core innate / transcendently necessary concepts, to which new concepts are added over time. In order to discount the possibility that Adorno is operating on this basis, I will need to examine Adorno's account of the emergence of language, which he runs together with his account of the emergence of concepts.

### **1.7 Tautology and Language**

I now provide further support for my claim that the state prior (or equivalent) to the occasioning of the concepts of cause and effect and appearance and essence was, in fact, a state which was entirely devoid of concepts. I do this by examining Adorno's account of the emergence of language. There is one particular passage in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* which covers this extensively:

The split between animate and inanimate, the assigning of demons and deities to certain specific places, arises from [the] pre-animism [inculcated by man's original terror]. Even the division of subject and object is prefigured in it. If the tree is addressed no longer as simply a tree but as evidence of something else, a location of *mana*, language expresses the contradiction that it is at the same time itself and something other than itself, identical and not identical. Through the deity speech is transformed from tautology into language. The concept, usually defined as the unity of the features of what it subsumes, was rather, from the first, a product of dialectical thinking, in which each thing is what it is only by becoming what it is not. This was the primal form of the objectifying definition, in which concept and thing became separate, the same definition which was already far advanced in the Homeric epic and trips over its own excesses in modern positive science. But this dialectic remains powerless as long as it emerges from the cry of terror, which is the doubling, the mere tautology of terror itself. (DE: 11).

This passage, taken as a whole, does of course present its own specific interpretive difficulties. However, I want to focus on three key assertions, which will prove essential to understanding Adorno's account of the emergence of language, and the wider significance of that account. These three assertions are – 1), that 'the concept and thing became separate', 2) that the original terror of nature inculcates the transition from 'tautology into language'; 3) that the concept is dialectical as in it 'each thing is what it is only by becoming what it is not'. A discussion of 3) will serve to anticipate our exploration of the inner constitution of the concept in the following Chapter.

First, then, Adorno's assertion that the 'concept and thing became separate'. It is a simple, but crucial, inference from this assertion that this separation is not essential in the relation of concept to thing, but is rather something which *came to be*. It follows from this, of course, that at one point the concept and thing were united. A great deal of the remainder of this Chapter will be dedicated to exploring precisely what consequences arise from this putative unity of concept and thing. I will argue that this unity of the concept and thing, prior to the emergence of the conventional employment of concepts, in fact entails the absence of conceptuality, thereby proving that Adorno in fact allows for the possibility of a non-conceptually mediated form of experience.

In order to begin substantiating this, we should consider what the epistemological consequences of a unity of concept and thing would be. It is apparent

that by 'thing' Adorno is here referring to the specific thing (rather than class of things). That this is so can be seen from the German term employed – Adorno employs the singular '*Sache*' (as opposed to '*Sachen*' which would denote general collections of things) which has the clear connotation of the specific object (Adorno 1997a: 32). Moreover, Adorno claims that this unity of the concept and thing obtains prior to the emergence of the 'objectifying definition' (DE: 11). Therefore, it is before the emergence of the general class, given the plausible assumption that definition entails general classes.<sup>9</sup>

Having established that Adorno is referring to the unity of the concept and specific thing, we must now consider the nature of a thing in its specificity. Adorno's central disagreement with 'identity thinking' is the concept's inability to capture objects in their full specificity (ND: 148 / 151). Adorno does not give a settled account of what determines a particular object in its specificity. However, we can infer from his critique of identity thinking that the object's specificity is constituted by the complexity of its constitution. It seems plausible, and at least compatible with Adorno's account, to say that every specific thing is differentiated from its peers, as it were, by its complex of properties, where this complex consists of intrinsic and relational properties. We have seen that the unity of concept and specific thing is prior to the emergence of definition, and prior to any separation of concept and specific thing. Hence, this unity cannot be a unity in the same way in which the general concept 'bison' and a specific individual mammal satisfying this concept could be said to be united. Rather, it must be a complete conformity of the concept to a specific thing. This being so, for a concept to be united to its specific object, such that it cannot be united to any other, it must somehow exhaust the object's specificity. Which is to say, the concept must exhaust the object's complex of properties, the concept being constituted by nothing over and above the specificity of a single object. This being so, each specific object would determine and fall under no other concept than its own (remember that the unity of concept and thing is a condition of every concept, for Adorno, at this stage). Seeing as this would be the condition for every concept, according to Adorno, no general concepts could be formed under which sets of objects could fall. At this point, when the concept and thing are not separated, the term 'concept' seems to be used merely by

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<sup>9</sup> This assumption may seem odd; after all, one can imagine a definition of a specific object. In which case, what role does the 'general class' have to play? In defining a specific object, one nonetheless employs general concepts and classes. A definition (which is not merely ostensive) is accomplished by the enumeration of a set of conditions ('must be red, spherical, etc.'). These conditions are themselves general concepts (redness, sphericity) being employed in order to describe a specific object. Even should a definition consist solely of indexicals, as opposed to general properties, the definition nonetheless retains its generality just by its failure to *necessarily* correspond to any one object in the ontological set. Rather, it ranges over all of these objects, and acts as a definition to *any* object in that set which satisfies it.

courtesy. The conceptual manifold amounts to merely a series of ostensive terms linked exclusively to specific objects. I argue, then, that this level of 'conceptuality' in fact wholly precludes anything resembling conceptuality proper, let alone the conceptual mediation of perception.

In order to further support this, it would be helpful to turn to a line of argument which Adorno runs together with his account of the emergence of the concept – namely, his assertion that the emergence of the concept was accompanied by the transition from tautology to language. We saw in the extended quote above that Adorno held that the concept was at one point not separated from the specific thing, thereby arresting linguistic behaviour at the stage of tautology rather than language;

Through the deity [i.e., through the 'preanimism' of magical behaviour] speech is transformed from tautology into language [...] This was the primal form of the objectifying definition, in which concept and thing became separate[.] (DE: 11).

Adorno's opposition of tautology to language is odd. Tautology is usually held, along with contradiction, to represent limiting cases of the employment of language, rather than something which is external or opposed to non-tautological language itself. In considering precisely what it is about tautology which Adorno is opposing to language, we will be able to throw further light on the non-separation of concept and thing.

In considering the non-separation of concept and thing, we have established that this epistemological mode is a travesty of conceptuality, in that each concept is bereft of generality and refers solely to its specific object (as constituted in its specificity by its complex of properties). We should now consider what an utterance of this concept, or rather, of a term standing in for this concept, would amount to – what types of sentences could it constitute? In being employed, this utterance would exhaust its specific object entirely. Which is to say, it would have complete reference to the specific object, as it appeared to the speaker.<sup>10</sup> This in itself does not preclude the employment of this term / concept in language. It is the fact that *all* concepts are constructed on this model which prevents the formation of recognizably linguistic (non-tautological) sentences.

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<sup>10</sup> It must have specific reference to the object as it appears to the speaker simply because the concept in this epistemological mode does not have an inherent understanding of the revisability of the properties of an object, such that one could synthesize two slightly differing reports as concerning the same object under differing perspectives. This is supported by Adorno's assertion that the distinction between 'appearance and essence' (DE: 10) only arises after this epistemological stage has been abandoned. However, I also explain this in further detail below.

One might demonstrate this point by attempting to construct an informative sentence within this epistemological mode (of the unity of concepts and things). Let us take the neologism 'wylt' to refer (*only* and *wholly*) to a specific carnation. A (Barbara) syllogism has the form -

All *a* are *x*

*n* is an *a*

*n* is an *x*

This term 'wylt' cannot be conjoined to any other term syllogistically, just because there is no concept with any generality to allow such a sentence to be constructed. Let us substitute 'wylt' for *n*. Required for the successful completion of the syllogism will be the insertion of two genera in place of *a* and *x*. However, our conceptual 'tool kit' will at this point be wholly constituted by 'concepts' of the same type as 'wylt'. Which is to say, each concept will be completely exhausted by one specific object's properties, with no degree of generality. As such, no other concept can successfully correspond to any other, beyond being completely identical to it (i.e., being solely referent to the same object). In this epistemological mode, then, a syllogistic inference cannot be performed, as the general concepts required to fill *a* & *x* are unavailable.

Similarly, less formal methods of constructing sentences, with the possible exception of ostension, would appear to be impossible. For example, consider 'wylt is like gylf', 'gylf' having exhaustive reference to some other, different specific carnation. The relation of 'like' might appear to dodge the problems of the syllogism, by not employing any formal genera to which the objects in question must conform. However, in order to make sense of an assertion of likeness, we must be able first to comprehend a) in what the likeness might consist and, at a more basic level, b) the sense of the relation of 'likeness' in itself.

It is a relatively simple matter to show that a) is unavailable in this case. Being that 'wylt' and 'gylf' are each carnations, one might understand their likeness as consisting in – 'being flowers', 'being carnations', 'being coloured white', etc. However, this understanding is itself parasitic on an understanding of qualities in isolation from their specific objects – 'whiteness', 'carnation-ness', etc. We have already seen that Adorno has denied that this form of conceptuality is possible, given the unity of every concept to a specific object. We cannot help ourselves to the concept of being alike by virtue of any property (or collection of properties) without necessarily positing the kind of concept which is *ex hypothesi* impossible at this stage – namely, a general concept of a given property or genus, which does not have necessary and exhaustive reference to a specific object.

From a) we have seen that understanding a relation of likeness between two



objects requires access to a mediating concept, namely that of the concept of a property which is not exhaustively linked to a specific object, which is unavailable prior to the separation of the concept and thing. This being so (moving to point b)), it would appear that even the formulation of a sentence using the concept of 'likeness' would be impossible – the language user in question would have no way of acquainting himself with the practice of drawing likenesses between things, if there were no available conceptual materials for drawing such a likeness. Prior to the separation of the concept and thing, then, any assertion of an 'is like' relation between two objects is not only devoid of sense, but in fact impossible.

What appears to be at issue in the above examples is that any use of language which is informative, and has a truth value which exceeds the necessarily true (tautological) or necessarily false (contradictory) relies upon the employment of the contrast between the universal and particular. It is the particular's conformity to or divergence from the universal which allows us to employ language, to make informative utterances about objects. In an epistemological stage before the formation of universals, then, language use (as opposed to the tautological employment of 'concepts' just examined) seems impossible.

We may now begin to see why Adorno terms this epistemological / linguistic stage 'tautology'- the utterance (or thought) of the concept serves to exhaust any possible assertion about its object. The concept is necessarily true, insofar as it simply serves to evoke the specific experienced object. In this tautological form, the concept has forfeited its universality – it has necessary reference to one specific object. This forfeiture has the double result that the formation of language would appear impossible, and the concept would appear to have lost its essential constituent, namely its universality. Such an epistemological stage is non-conceptual simply because the concept, as we conventionally employ it and as it must be in order to mediate perception in the relevant sense, has an intrinsic universality which has no necessary and exhaustive reference to any spatio-temporally specific object. This tautological epistemological stage which Adorno refers to now seems plausibly non-conceptual.<sup>11</sup> However, we can further reinforce this interpretation of Adorno by examining his account of the transition from tautology to language.

### **1.8 From Tautology to Language**

Following on directly from Adorno's assertion that '[t]hrough the deity speech is transformed from tautology into language' (DE: 11) is the following sentence -

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<sup>11</sup> For economy of expression, from this point I will refer to this epistemological mode of the unity of concept and thing as the 'tautological epistemological mode'.

The concept, usually defined as the unity of the features of what it subsumes, was rather, from the first, a product of dialectical thinking, in which each thing is what it is only by becoming what it is not. (DE: 11).

This sentence, then, follows on from Adorno's assertion concerning the transition from tautology to language, and is itself directly followed by the assertion that this dialectical concept was 'the primal form of objectifying definition' which allowed man to '[emerge] from the cry of terror' (DE: 11). As such, this account of the concept is clearly being positioned as an account of the constitutive epistemological process which allowed for this emergence from the terror of nature and, moreover, the emergence from tautology. In considering precisely what Adorno means by his definition of the 'dialectical' concept as the means of transition from tautology and terror into the conceptual, we will be able to confidently establish that this terror was in fact non-conceptual, and thus that Adorno allows for experience to be non-conceptually mediated. As a consequence, we will be able to understand precisely what sort of necessity Adorno allots to the conceptual mediation of experience.

### **1.8.1 An Exegetical Problem**

Before we do this, however, there is a small exegetical problem. Adorno asserts above that the concept 'from the first' was a product of 'dialectical thinking'. To anticipate the discussion below, this latter will be shown to mean that the concept ceases to have a direct, exhaustive and necessary reference to a specific object. The problem lies in Adorno's assertion that this was the case 'from the first' – after all, prior to this point we have seen Adorno assert that the concept was united to the thing and, moreover, that this constituted a tautological epistemological mode. I will demonstrate below that Adorno's assertion that the concept is 'dialectical', can only be understood as an assertion concerning the concept's employment of general terms. The concept's dialecticality will consist in its not having necessary and exhaustive reference to a single specific object. However, as I have shown, just this dialecticality appears to be precluded by the uniting of the concept with the object. There is a conflict, then- Adorno asserts that the concept was 'from the first' dialectical, while, in his account of the unity of concept and thing, appearing to demonstrate a non-dialectical employment of the concept. If we construe this conflict as genuine, then Adorno's work is simply contradictory, as it would impute to the concept a universal form ('from the first') while elsewhere demonstrating a different form of concept (in the 'tautological' mode of uniting the concept to the thing). There are two ways of resolving this problem. Either

this conflict of the concept's two modes (of non-dialecticality in being united to the thing, and of dialecticality in not being so united) is merely apparent due to my misinterpretation of Adorno's account of the concept's being united to the thing, or the conflict is merely apparent due to Adorno's lack of care in expression.

The former possibility, that this apparent conflict is due to my misinterpretation of Adorno's meaning concerning the unity of concept and thing, would mean that in fact the unity of concept and thing was already dialectical, in the sense outlined above. In this case, it would render puzzling Adorno's assertion that the transition from tautology, and the separation of concept and thing, was effected by the dialectical concept. If the concept was dialectical in form in *each* case, the source of the transition from tautology into language is left obscure, as is the reason for Adorno's juxtaposition in the text of this transition and the essential role of the dialecticality of the concept in that transition.

Although I believe discarding my interpretation would be an error, for the above reasons, if I am wrong concerning the non-conceptuality of the unity of concept and thing, this error would leave the main thrust of this Chapter untouched. Adorno asserts that enlightenment reason depends on the separation of concept and thing (DE: 11). Moreover, as has already been shown, Adorno holds the enlightenment form of thought to be emergent. This being so, if the uniting of concept and thing does not accord with the non-conceptual 'cry of terror' as I had thought, my account is still secure. Adorno nonetheless holds that the enlightenment form of thought is constitutively dependent on the employment of concepts, and emerged from some other epistemological mode opposed to it (DE: 10 – 11). This being so, it still appears eminently plausible that the opposing epistemological mode must, in being so opposed, have been bereft of the constitutive feature of enlightenment thought (the 'dialectical' employment of classifying concepts). As such, this original epistemological mode would have to be non-conceptual.

The latter option in resolving this conflict, that Adorno is simply expressing himself slackly, is far more cogent, simply because there is a great deal of difficulty in understanding the tautological, pre-magical mode of the unity of concept and thing as in any way corresponding to the properties which Adorno here attaches to the concept 'from the first', as I have shown above.

### **1.8.2 The Possibility of Non-Conceptual Experience**

I hope I have shown that Adorno's assertion that the concept was 'from the first' dialectical is either *not* a mistake in expression, in which case the ultimate aim of this Chapter (demonstrating that Adorno allows for a non-conceptually mediated experience) is nonetheless secure, or, more likely, it *is* a mistake in expression, in

which case the following exegesis will demonstrate that Adorno in fact takes the 'tautological' unity of concept and thing to be not mediated by concepts. I will now leave this problem, and continue with my analysis of what Adorno means by calling the concept 'dialectical'. Let us reconsider the quote in question :

The concept, usually defined as the unity of the features of what it subsumes, was rather, from the first, a product of dialectical thinking, in which each thing is what it is only by becoming what it is not. (DE: 11).

Perhaps the most puzzling part of this extract is Adorno's assertion that the concept's operation entails that 'each thing is what it is only by becoming what it is not' (DE: 11). In order to throw light on this, let us consider again the problem of the 'tautological' employment of concepts. The peculiar problem of that form of conceptuality, and attendant linguistic behaviour, was that the concept was in complete accord with its object but, in so mirroring its object, it thereby precluded any communicative behaviour, judgement and, moreover, the acquisition of detailed knowledge. These were precluded just because the conformity of the concept to the object prevented the formation of general concepts which bore no necessary reference to specific objects. In the absence of such general concepts, knowledge of the object could not be communicated beyond bald ostension. Detailed knowledge was impossible just because, having only concepts which merged with specific objects, understanding the complicated causal structure of an object would appear to be impossible. For example, if I were to place a red object in green light, and to observe the resultant alteration in the object's colour, I would only be able to draw any inference about the general behaviour of coloured objects should I be in possession of the general concepts of colour, coloured objects, etc. However, we have already seen that these general concepts are unavailable. As such, one's definition of the object cannot be cashed out in more general, nor in communicable, terms. These are the characteristic difficulties of the unity of the concept and thing. In considering what is necessary in order to surmount these difficulties, it will become apparent what Adorno intends in referring to the concept as dialectical, and displaying what the object is by means of its becoming what it is not.

If one separates the concept and thing, we instantly acquire a web of universal, general concepts, none of which have an intrinsic reference to a specific object. The object's correspondence to any given concept is contingent, which is why the object's conformity to that concept is informative. There is no concept which exhaustively models a specific object with no further universality. On the previous epistemological

model, we 'knew' an object simply by virtue of appending a concept to the specific object, which thereby modelled nothing but that object. In this instance, then, the concept served as a token to signify the object, with no intrinsic meaning beyond that object. Once the separation of concept and thing has been effected, the reverse obtains, which is to say that the object is known insofar as we comprehend its conformity and divergence with each of the elements of our array of universals. As such, the object becomes a token which signifies the matrices of its agreement with various universals, and is known, and is communicable, insofar as we comprehend these agreements and divergences. For example, should I have a dog, I do not possess a single concept which exhausts that animal. Rather, I have a name, emptied of intrinsic meaning, which is cashed out in terms of various general properties, none of which have specific reference solely to my dog – 'mammal', 'not rabid', 'brindle', etc. I suggest that this is what Adorno has in mind, in asserting that with the advent of conceptual thinking 'each thing is only by becoming what it is not' (DE: 11); the object, rather than having a specific concept which matches its specificity, is rather placed into a mediating context of a web of concepts, in respect to which the object is merely a token of its agreement or disagreement with those concepts. In taking on this 'tokenality' the object forfeits its specificity ('becomes what it is not'), but thereby becomes comprehensible and communicable. Thereby, the object can become 'what it is' through being comprehensible through this extensive web of general concepts, and thereby linguistic behaviour becomes possible. All manner of informative sentences can be constructed, by means of introducing the dichotomy between universal and particular.

In referring to the dialecticality of the concept, then, it would appear that Adorno is simply drawing our attention to a neglected feature of the concept. Why, though, does Adorno assert that this dialecticality diverges from being 'the unity of the features of what it subsumes' (DE: 11)? After all, this transition to general concepts would not seem to exclude these concepts being defined by the unity of features which are subsumed under them. As shall be argued in more detail in the following Chapter, Adorno does not hold the formation of concepts to necessarily derive from any truth in man's environment – they are rather formed according to one's self-interest. As such, the conceptual web with which the object agrees may have no correspondence to any property of the object. For Adorno, in separating the concept from the object, we are not releasing the object into a web of concepts, all of which have in actuality genuine reference, but rather placing an object in a mediating web of concepts, not all of which will have any actual ontological foundation in the subsumed objects themselves.

We have seen, then, that the employment of concepts is for Adorno an

emergent practice – it is not innate, nor transcendently necessary, but rather originates in the separation of the concept and thing. Prior to this separation, every concept was united to a specific thing. I have argued that this unity of concept and thing in fact travesties conceptuality, and thereby prevents the employment of concepts at this stage. Now that we have examined my two lines of argument, from the occasioning of concepts, and from Adorno's account of the generation of language, we have established that this stage, prior to the generation of language and 'objectifying definition' was devoid of concepts, and thereby devoid of conceptual mediation.

Having concluded this line of argument, then, we have established that Adorno, although asserting that conceptuality is necessary for the 'continuity' of experience, in fact allows that non-conceptually mediated experience is possible.<sup>12</sup> This vastly complicates the apparently Kantian tenor of Adorno's position, and throws into question the nature of the necessity which Adorno is imputing to the conceptuality of experience. We will now consider this latter question.

### **1.9. Discontinuity and Conceptuality**

It is already apparent that the necessity which Adorno appends to the conceptuality of experience cannot be straightforwardly transcendental, as we have established that experience can in fact take place outside of the mediation of the concept. I propose that we examine the nature of this non-conceptual experience in order to understand why Adorno holds its abolition to be necessary.

You will recall that Adorno held that conceptuality was necessary for the continuity of experience. Therefore, *ex hypothesi*, this original non-conceptual form of experience was discontinuous – it was devoid of any general concepts which could have unified that experience. I will argue that this lack of continuity is *pragmatically* unsustainable, for the kind of beings that we are. Furthermore, it is this pragmatic unworkability which gives rise to the 'cry of terror' which Adorno alleges is the genesis of the conceptual. As such, concepts, which alleviate this discontinuity, are necessary for pragmatic reasons. Adorno therefore transposes Kant's deduction from the transcendental to the pragmatic. In order for this unusual argument to appear plausible as an interpretation of Adorno, I would like to flesh out the assertion that such a mode of experience would be pragmatically unsustainable. I hope to show this by demonstrating that in the tautological epistemological mode, given the assertions which Adorno makes about this mode, the individual has no cognitive resources by which to

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<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, this non-conceptual experience is not only *possible*, but in fact has occurred, and it is from this form of experience that conceptual experience was derived. The problematic question of how one might derive concepts from the unconceptually mediated will become highly significant in the next Chapter.

meaningfully relate any discrete experience to any other. As a consequence of the absence of general concepts, it will be shown, the individual in this epistemological mode will be bereft of a reliable ontology (i.e. they will be unable to see the same entities persisting from experience to experience) and of a causal understanding of their environment. It would be as well to address these two lines of thought in turn.

### **1.10 The Absence of Ontology**

In the course of the remainder of this Chapter, I will have frequent reference to Adorno's 'ontology'. I stipulate Adorno's 'ontology' to refer to the phenomenal ontology of the agent. As such, I will not be attempting to derive a given argument about the objective ontology of objects in themselves, but rather about the phenomenal ontology presented to the agent, and the conditions of the possibility of this phenomenal ontology. This stipulation also applies to the variations on the term 'ontology' I will use, such as 'weak ontology', 'rich ontology' and so on – these remain referent solely to phenomenal ontology.

I will argue that, given Adorno's assertions about the epistemological state prior to the separation of the concept and thing, the individual undergoing this epistemological mode will be not only incapable of formulating a general, rich ontology (including general classes, properties, etc.), but in fact incapable of forming a basic, 'weak' ontology (of individuating objects across discrete experiences over time). The former assertion has already been supported in the course of this Chapter. The latter assertion however, concerning the impossibility of a basic ontology, outstrips the position which Adorno explicitly maintains in his work. I will now demonstrate that this move is justified.

### **1.11 Weak Ontology**

Adorno is largely silent on the ontological constitution of the epistemological stage which gives rise to the 'cry of terror'. As such, one's interpretation of Adorno on this score takes place somewhat in a vacuum. There is an isolated utterance in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, however, which suggests that Adorno is too lax in his account of the consequences of the non-dialecticality of thought prior to the separation of concept and thing. Adorno says -

The cry of terror called forth by the unfamiliar becomes its name. It fixes the transcendence of the unknown in relation to the known [...] If the tree is addressed no longer as simply a tree but as evidence of something else, a location of *mana*, language expresses the contradiction that it is at the

same time itself and something other than itself, identical and not identical.  
(DE: 10 -11).

We can see in this quote that Adorno is imputing to primitive magical behaviour the beginning of conceptuality – the employment of 'mana' inaugurates the contradictoriness of something being 'itself and something other than itself', which Adorno, on the same page, asserts is constitutive for the concept (DE: 11). The laxity in Adorno's thought is in his assertion that, prior to this epistemological practice, one can see a tree 'as simply a tree'. We have already seen, from examining Adorno's thought, that at this stage general concepts such as 'tree' are unavailable, due to the unity of concepts and specific things. What is at stake in this quote, then, is that Adorno seems to be relying on the idea that the individual arrested at this pre-conceptual stage is able to still individuate objects over time (addressing a tree 'simply as a tree' – as a specific, individuated object). In other words, at this point, while a richer ontology of general classes may not be available, Adorno seems to be implying that a 'weak ontology' is available.

There is a trivial sense in which an ontology might be achievable with non-dialectical concepts, and this is that while I may not be able to identify the genus 'tree', 'rock', etc., I will nonetheless have a personal, consistent ontology, as it were, in being able to consistently attribute names to things. As such, I will not be able to acquire the general concept 'tree' but will be able to enduringly individuate a specific object, which happens to be a tree, across time. I will name this a 'weak ontology'. On this weak ontology, then, one can apply a name to a specific object, as in our example of the carnation 'wylt', but will not be able to acquire general concepts.

Regardless of whether Adorno himself holds a weak ontology to be possible at the tautological epistemological stage, it is important to demonstrate that it is not, in order to properly explain the nature of the necessity which Adorno allots to conceptuality. Adorno has asserted that, without concepts, experience does not have continuity (ND: 46 / 56). In examining Adorno's account of the 'tautological' epistemological mode, we have established that concepts cannot operate. This implies that a weak ontology would, at this epistemological stage, be impossible.

### **1.12 The Impossibility of Weak Ontology**

Adorno asserts that the concept is essential for the continuity of experience. Should this weak ontology inhere in the knower at the tautological epistemological stage, it would seem that the discontinuity which Adorno asserts must accompany the absence of conceptuality would not take place. While one may be unable to form general



concepts in order to arrive at generalized causal accounts, taxonomies, etc., nonetheless one would be able to unify one's experience as taking place with reference to the present specific objects, and their behavioural tendencies. For example, with a rich ontology, the experience of seeing our carnation sway in the wind and release pollen, causing a scent, is assured continuity by our explicit comprehension of the distinction between appearance and actual structures, between cause and effect, etc. However, in the example of the weak ontology, the experience still seems assured of continuity if one is able to individuate, however bereft of classifying concepts, the objects present in one's experience. The perceived flower 'wylt', while it changes its apparent properties (bending in the wind), is nonetheless still present as the same object. As such, the experience is continuous, as its disparate sensory constituents are organized, albeit not explicitly, around a centering conception of the object which is not exhausted by the properties which are presented to the eye immediately.

In order for the object to be individuated, and hence grant continuity to one's experiences, this individuation cannot be predicated on the immediately presented properties. Should this *not* be the case, should this awareness of the object not be based on the idea of what is in fact perceptually *absent* – that is, the object which is not exhausted by its immediate appearance – then this weak ontology collapses. If this were the case, one's ontology would be erased and rebuilt from moment to moment, with the alteration of these properties due to one's kinaestheses, natural causality, etc. If one can prove that this weak ontology, the possibility of which Adorno does not discount, is impossible, then, we will have displayed that this non-conceptual epistemological mode is truly discontinuous. This will have the benefit of ensuring Adorno's consistency and revealing to us why Adorno holds concepts to be necessary.

It is a short step to demonstrating that a 'weak' ontology of the type Adorno appears to be gesturing at is impossible. Individuation across time, as in our examination of a swaying carnation, presupposes a distinction between the object and its immediate properties. If a change in apparent properties is not taken to be a change in objects, the agent must be possessed of a concept of the object which is not exhausted by the presently presented phenomena. As such, the agent must be in possession of a concept which is 'dialectical' – not wholly identical to the presented object. However, as we have seen, Adorno asserts that precisely this is possible only once the transition from the tautological epistemological mode into 'language' and full-blown conceptuality has already been accomplished. As such, no weak ontology is possible at the tautological stage since there are no concepts available to facilitate the persistent individuation of objects. As such, experience in the tautological

epistemological state will have no persisting objects across time. We have established that it is wholly discontinuous.

With the erasure of a persisting ontology, then, it should be obvious why causal forms of knowledge are also impossible at this tautological epistemological stage, as Adorno himself affirms.<sup>13</sup> If from discrete moment to discrete moment the set of presented objects is altered, any objective causal process will not be perceptible, just in virtue of the absence of any continuous ontology. In the absence of a continuous, enduringly individuated environment an objective causal process will not appear as a given process affecting a given object, but rather a disparate collection of behaviours of disparate, distinct objects. To return to the example of the carnation bending in the wind, each discrete presentation of apparent qualities will result in reindividuation. As such, one will not experience a single object undergoing a behaviour which one might try and comprehend, but rather a procession of distinct objects.

### 1.13 Conceptuality and Self-Interest

This now concludes our examination of the pre-conceptual state posited by Adorno. The primary importance of this examination is that we have established that Adorno does hold non-conceptual experience to be possible. By examining his commitments in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, we have established that conceptuality *comes about* rather than being innate or transcendently necessary for experience *simpliciter*. This allows us, then, to return to the question which begun this Chapter – what is the nature of the necessity of conceptuality, for Adorno?

In the previous section, we established that, in line with Adorno's thought but against his lapse in expression, pre-conceptual thought was both devoid of a continuous ontology, and moreover experienced as acausal. While this is not held to be a transcendently impossible form of experience, for Adorno, it would appear that it is *pragmatically* unsustainable. Given its strong discontinuity, the enduring identification and comprehension of objects appears to be impossible. If this is the case, then this form of experience must *necessarily* be abandoned *if* the agent is to be able to identify and manipulate regularities in his experience. The agent is unavoidably thrust into the project of identifying and manipulating regularities by virtue of the intrinsic pragmatic demands of the type of creature that he is. He is a creature that has organic needs (food, water, etc.) and cannot satisfy these needs without comprehending and manipulating his environment. As such, the agent's nature and attendant desire for self-preservation compel him to engage in the project of identifying and manipulating

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<sup>13</sup> This is shown in Adorno's assertion that the distinction between 'effect and force' was not present at this earlier epistemological stage (DE: 10).

regularities in order to find sustenance in his environment. The necessity of conceptuality therefore derives from the agent's self interest. The necessity of conceptual mediation comes not from its being a transcendental condition of the possibility of any experience whatsoever, but from its being a transcendental condition of the possibility of the agent's project of self-preservation (which itself entails the need for continuous experience).

This may sound like an overly speculative take on Adorno's thought concerning the concept, but it is in fact attested to in Adorno's work.<sup>14</sup> The above has served to demonstrate the grounds for this belief of Adorno's. It has also served to problematize the medium in which the relationship between thought and object is realized. We have seen that this medium is conceptually structured without, however, any guarantee that the conceptual mediation is amenable to the instantiation of truth. The following Chapter will be dedicating to elucidating the precise nature of this problematic.

### **1.14 The Nature of the Concept**

At the close of this Chapter, then, we have established that for Adorno continuous experience is necessarily conceptually mediated. The medium of experience is necessarily conceptually structured, and this structure must factor in any putative explanation of the access to the non-identical. In establishing the conceptual mediation of experience, we also established that Adorno has problematized the constitution of the concept. Rather than positing the concept as deriving from an attempt to grasp truth, we saw that Adorno instead saw concepts as derived from the requirements of self-preservation. Relatedly, we saw that these self-preserving concepts were produced out of a non-conceptual epistemological state.

These two issues – concepts being self-preserving rather than necessarily geared towards truth, and concepts being derived from non-conceptual experience – open two questions. We will need to gain a more finessed understanding of the precise nature of concepts (exactly how is their operation self-preserving? Does this hold for all concepts?), and an understanding of how these concepts are formed (how were they derived from non-conceptual experience? And how are concepts formed once this non-conceptual experience is left behind?).

We have established that experience is structured conceptually – addressing

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<sup>14</sup> 'In truth, all concepts, even the philosophical ones, refer to nonconceptualities, because concepts on their part are moments of the reality that requires their formation, primarily for the control of nature.' (ND: 11 / 23) In this example, we see that Adorno identifies concepts not with an attempt to cognize the world accurately, but rather as deriving from the agent's desire to control his environment. While in order to control the world some *basic* correspondence between concept and reality is necessary, this does not guarantee that the concept will be wholly accurate.

these two issues will demonstrate in detail Adorno's theory of the nature of these structuring concepts. This will serve to constrain the possible nature of the non-identical, and of the eligible form of philosophical and aesthetic instantiations of it. The problematic of the structure of experience will be determined by the nature of the constituents of that structure. As such, we must now turn in the following Chapter to consider Adorno's theory of the concept.

## **2. – Totality, Universality and the Concept**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In the previous Chapter, we stipulated, with some argumentative support, that the non-identical must be accessed in the medium of experience (sections 1.2 and 1.3). As was argued throughout Chapter 1, the medium of continuous experience is necessarily conceptually mediated. As such, this access to the non-identical must take place via the concept, by virtue of taking place in experience.

In Chapter 1, we were also able to explain the grounds for Adorno's assertion that concepts are necessary for continuous experience. We established that Adorno grounds the necessity of concepts for experience in a transcendental argument from self-preservation. Non-conceptual experience is possible, but for the ongoing constitution of the self and the satisfaction of the self's basic needs, concepts necessarily *must* be formed. The necessity of concepts, then, derives from their role in securing the agent's self-preservation. They are what Adorno terms 'idea-tool[s]' (DE: 31) employed solely (outside of dialectical philosophy and authentic art) to secure self-preservation.

This Chapter will be concerned with a problem which arises given the conjunction, in Adorno's theory, of three claims. The first two have just been enumerated – that continuous experience is necessarily conceptually mediated and that concepts are inherently merely self-preserving. These two claims are perfectly consistent, but they come into conflict with a third feature of Adorno's philosophy. This is Adorno's reliance on the idea that his analyses (of the non-identical as found in philosophy and art, and in his sociological and 'metalogical'<sup>15</sup> analyses more generally) hold universally for all agents.<sup>16</sup> Adorno feels entitled to assert that a quirk identified in any given concept (e.g., that the concept of *x* employed dialectically reverses into *y*) holds universally, for all subjects.

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<sup>15</sup> Adorno takes concepts to have innate reference to extra-conceptual, socio-historical conditions. This reference he terms 'meta-logical' (Jarvis 1998: 153)

<sup>16</sup> Adorno's frequent declamations of the cataclysmic homogeneity of society, and thought in society, are subject to a mild interpretive controversy. Adorno often gestures towards the usefulness of the practice of exaggeration ('But only exaggeration is true.' (DE: 92), which leads some interpreters to interpret Adorno's assertions concerning homogeneity to be themselves examples of this practice (i.e. - hyperbolic). However, Adorno elsewhere gives reason to think that he is rather more sincere than this. For example, Adorno alleges that only 'a stroke of undeserved luck' allows for critical, non-reified thought (ND: 41 / 51). As such, this issue is somewhat interpretively 'open'. While I do try to close this ambiguity in section 3.5, I should for now to merely note that I incline towards seeing as Adorno as not methodologically hyperbolic. At any rate, regardless of the way in which one resolves the ambiguity, one can say at a minimum on any interpretation that Adorno held society to be *virtually* or *largely* homogeneous, which stands in need of justification just as much as the stronger assertion of complete universality.

To show why this third feature, Adorno's reliance on the universality of his analyses, is problematic I will demonstrate first that Adorno's analyses require universal scope and, secondly, that Adorno's account of the formation of concepts discussed in Chapter 1 appears to allow the possibility that individuals have divergent sets of concepts, thus preventing the universal scope of these analyses.

In this Chapter, I will have repeated reference to 'conceptual sets', 'conceptual arrays' and the 'social universality of conceptual arrays'. I stipulate the meaning of 'conceptual set' to be simply the set of concepts which the individual possesses. I stipulate the meaning of 'conceptual array' to be that set of concepts which the individual possesses, the internal determining relations which obtain between those concepts (i.e., concept x being the condition of the possibility of, or a mediating influence on, concept y), and the relationship of both the set and the internal determining relationships to given metalogical conditions (social conditions, relations of production, etc.). I stipulate the meaning of the 'social universality of conceptual arrays' simply to be the total or virtually total (cf. footnote 16) incidence of a given conceptual array in a given society. I should add, for the sake of completeness, that the social universality of conceptual arrays applies both concerning the concepts the individual actually has, as well as the concepts he could conceivably go on to acquire – the conceptual array of a given individual's array might be missing certain constituents (for example, a recluse might have no concepts relating to architecture), but *should they acquire these concepts* they would be in conformity with the socially universal conceptual array. Without this stipulation, the idea of social universality would be absurd, as we would have to believe that each individual, regardless of experience, possesses a full conceptual array which exhausts all possible experiences.

Due to the fact that conceptual arrays hold socially universally in this way, it is often helpful to refer to the conceptual array in abstraction from an individual holding those concepts. As the social whole determines and imposes the conceptual array, I will occasionally have reference to 'the conceptual array' that holds in society or governs society. I do this strictly for economy of expression – I do not mean to imply the conceptual array is in some way reified into existence, outside of the conceptual apparatuses of individuals. Rather, the universal imposition of this conceptual array onto all individuals by the social totality makes it economical to speak of a conceptual array existing, as it were, in the determining influence of society itself.

Finally, I will frequently make use of the term 'social totality'. For the purposes of this discussion, this should be understood as short hand for reference to the social whole, this whole being constituted not merely by individuals and institutions, but also determining processes and influences, and the complexity of the interaction between

these constituents.

## 2.2 Adorno's Reliance on Universality

Adorno employs and relies on universality in two key ways. First, he relies on the existence of a socially universal conceptual array. Secondly, Adorno holds that the concepts in the socially universal conceptual array are universally applied solely with a view to self-preservation, and hence in a coercive controlling manner. I want to first briefly demonstrate exegetically that Adorno does rely upon and employ these forms of universality, before I move to showing why this reliance is problematic.

Adorno operates consistently with the presupposition that, for all individuals, their individual experience can be taken to be determined by and illustrative of, the social whole and, conversely, that the social whole itself serves to ensure that all individuals are so determined by and reflective of that whole. This is most baldly asserted by Adorno in the introduction to *Minima Moralia*:

Nevertheless, in an individualistic society, the general not only realizes itself through the interplay of particulars, but society is essentially the substance of the individual [...] For this reason, social analysis can learn incomparably more from individual experience than Hegel conceded. (MM: 17).

For a writer as diffident about explicitly laying out his methodology as Adorno, this constitutes a strikingly direct declaration of a founding methodological principle. Adorno asserts directly that analysis of the social whole ('social analysis') can be conducted through examination of the immediate experience of the individual. The relationship between the individual and society which makes this possible is that society is 'the substance of the individual'. This is a clear example of a strong asymmetrical determining relation obtaining between the individual and society. This assertion is clarified in *Negative Dialectics* -

[T]hings of the mind are not constituted by the cognitive intentionality of consciousness, but are based objectively, far beyond the individual author, on the collective life of the mind, in accordance with its imminent laws. (ND: 82 / 89)

Society is the 'substance' of the individual just insofar as it is society that has a powerful determining influence on what the individual takes to be his own free, autonomous thought. The universality of this assertion, its applying to all individuals,

can also be seen at work implicitly in the above quote – it is made categorically, with reference to individual experience *simpliciter*, without qualification. This implicit claim is made explicit, however, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* -

Through the mediation of the total society, which encompasses all relationships and impulses, human beings are being turned back into precisely what the developmental law of society, the principle of the self, had opposed; mere examples of the species, identical to one another through isolation within the compulsively controlled collectivity [...] (DE: 29)

Adorno is asserting here that, due to socio-historical conditions (he reinforces this thought later – 'It is the concrete conditions of work in society which enforce conformism' (DE: 29)) the autonomy of the individual, which the concept of the individual presupposes, has been progressively converted into heteronomy – for all individuals. What presents itself as autonomous thought is in fact thoroughly determined and mediated by the social whole. The generality of the claim, as opposed to it only applying to a given class or type of individual, is demonstrated by Adorno's employment of the unqualified class 'human beings' as the subject of this process of social mediation of the individual.

I hope that this makes plausible the thought that Adorno relies on the social universality of conceptual arrays as a fundamental presupposition. This presupposition of the social universality of conceptual arrays draws its vital importance from the way in which Adorno employs it. Adorno relies on this universality in his philosophical, sociological and aesthetic analyses. The conclusions, and conceptual critiques, derived from these critiques are presented without qualification. In other words, they are implicitly held to be the case for all users of the relevant concepts. As such, his critiques are held to have universal scope (relative to their socio-historical context). This is important because Adorno takes it that analyses of those phenomena excluded by the conventional conceptual boundaries of philosophy are revelatory of the non-conceptual -

[T]he interest of philosophy can be found to lie at the precise point where [...] the entire philosophical tradition [has] no interest, namely, in the *non-conceptual* [...] Freudian psychology [pays attention...] to the dross, the 'dregs of the phenomenal world', to otherwise neglected phenomena [...] if you have a theory like Freud's, and a well-formed theory of repression, you will be able to see in advance that such apparently lifeless, obscure objects



may contain something of interest that has been pulled out of shape. [Freudian analysis combines] an element of the non-conceptual or, as we would say nowadays, the absurd, the irrational, with a relevance, an essential importance *for the concept*. I think, then, that philosophy [...] ought to follow Freud's truly brilliant example and concentrate on matters that have not been pre-digested by the pre-existing concepts of the prevailing philosophy and science. (Adorno 2003: 68 - 69)

Employing the methodological principle outlined above, Adorno conducts explanatory transitions from individual experience (and individual objects in the field of experience) to socio-historical and philosophical facts. These analyses are taken by Adorno to be revelatory of, or concerned with, the non-identical, and to be universally valid.

The pressing difficulty would appear to be the serious conceptual contradiction between Adorno's employment of social universality and his account of the nature of the concept as laid out in the previous Chapter. A second puzzle presented both by Adorno's work in general and the above quote in particular, is Adorno's presumption that the object itself contains, as it were, the critique unfolded by dialectical practice ('objects may contain something of interest that has been pulled out shape' (Adorno 2003: 69)). Adorno is here holding that the object bears in-itself these universally binding conceptual contents. This in itself a puzzle (how do objects bear socio-historical content in themselves?) which this Chapter should help clarify.

### **2.3 Universality and Self-Preservation**

In the previous Chapter, we discovered in the course of our investigation into the kind of necessity which Adorno allots to the concept that the concept was a product of self-preservation. The concept comes into being for the individual not due to any transcendental constraint on experience *simpliciter*, but rather solely due to the demands of self-preservation. Similarly, the concept's determining relations to other concepts, the way in which it mediates experience, etc., are not determined by the autonomous unfolding of the concept, but rather due to the concept's metalogical imbrication with self-preservation, and the context in which the individual's self-preservation has to operate. Put bluntly, then, the concept is for Adorno heteronomous or, put differently, adventitious. Seeing as the concept's necessity derives entirely from reference to the *individual's* self-preservation, there is no constraint internal to the concept *in itself* which determines the form it will take.

It is just this adventitiousness inherent in the concept which makes Adorno's reliance on the idea that conceptual arrays hold with social universality problematic.

The concept, as Adorno defines it, has no ability to ensure that the concepts which the individual forms are in conformity with the concepts formed by other individuals. This is just because Adorno has emptied the concept of any necessity other than that deriving from the individual's own self-preservation. As the concept constitutes a reflection of the pragmatic requirements of the individual's requirement for self-preservation, and self-preservation has reference solely *to the individual*, the concept has no internal resources to ensure its social universality. Which is to say, an individual's conceptual array is contingent on the requirements of his own self-preservation – as such, any conformity between the conceptual arrays of various individuals cannot be located as attributable to some feature of the *concept*, but rather some other, extra-conceptual, influence. For example, we might hold that the nature of the needs entailed by self-preservation just happen to converge for a set of individuals, and thus the conceptual arrays which reflect this happen to be identical for each individual. No appeal to an *inherent* feature or nature of the concept is possible, as Adorno's theory of the concept has emptied it of a transcendently necessary specific form.

The majority of this Chapter, then, will be spent examining this problem. Where should we locate that element which allows, and makes plausible, the social universality of conceptual arrays, given that it cannot be found in the concept itself?

A related problem is the universality of the mode of conceptual *employment*. Adorno not only holds that the concept is formed from self-preservation, but that it goes on to be employed in a self-preserving manner (DE: 10). This is simply left unexplained by Adorno. However, we cannot simply take it as an explanatorily basic feature of the concept, both because the resulting explanatory deficit is considerable, and because the account Adorno gives of this universal employment would then appear to commit the genetic fallacy (by presuming that ongoing conceptual employment is self-preserving due its genesis in self-preserving behaviour). While these two types of universality, of array and employment, are mutually conditioning, and must at points be considered together, I want to begin by considering the problem of universal conceptual employment. There are some problems in Adorno's theory of the universality of conceptual employment which threaten to destabilize his entire programme, and so I will address these in isolation first.

## 2.4 The Genetic Fallacy

The first problem which we face in understanding Adorno's reconciliation of the concept as self-preserving and the concept as universally obtaining, is that Adorno has apparently founded his account of the universal self-preserving nature of the concept on a particularly egregious genetic fallacy. This genetic fallacy seems to appear in

*Dialectic of Enlightenment*. This problem is simply that Adorno's account of the generation of self-preserving concepts appears to be posited as occurring solely due to a historically specific experience of fear -

[T]he primitive experiences [the] supernatural[...] The cry of terror called forth by the unfamiliar becomes its name. It fixes the transcendence of the unknown in relation to the known, *permanently* linking horror to holiness. The doubling of nature into appearance and essence [...] springs from human fear. (DE: 10, emphasis mine)

Most troubling in this extract is that the fearful reaction of the 'primitive' is explicitly shown to 'permanently' effect a change – here the link between 'horror and holiness'. This link of terror with the incomprehensible (the 'holy') is maintained in science's rejection of experience in favor of systematic consistency (DE: 7). This primitive 'cry of terror', the full consequences of which were laid out in the previous Chapter, is being posited as the cause of the ongoing epistemological mode. Adorno appears to be presenting us with a *phylogenetic* account of the self-preserving nature of concepts, and a fallacious one at that. An account which explains any human practice or epistemological capacity as arising in some psychological or emotively charged origin does not entail that the subsequent continuation of those practices or capacities will retain that charge. If Adorno's account here were merely fallacious, Adorno's philosophical position as a whole would be jeopardized. In order for Adorno to maintain the founding thesis of the dialectic of enlightenment – the conformity between modern and primitive thought in prizing self-preservation over fidelity to experience – he needs a justification for extending his historically specific account of the primitive to the concepts held outside of this historical period.

If we follow Adorno's commitments carefully, this difficulty can be dissolved. In the last Chapter we discovered that Adorno does not hold the concept to be innate, but rather a contingent epistemological technique created to obtain control over one's environment. This lack of innateness should cause us to re-describe Adorno's theory as ontogenetic. In the previous Chapter, we saw that human experience is not inherently conceptually mediated – it is the conflict between the discontinuity of non-conceptual experience and human need which gives rise to the contingent formation of concepts. As concepts are not innate, presumably no historical event (be it concerning a primitive ancestor or anyone else) can *make* them innate. This being so, for every individual there will be a point at which they will be bereft of concepts, and hence experience the clash between the discontinuity of their environment and their pragmatic need. So, from

this clash they will be faced with the 'terror' Adorno identifies and be forced into generating concepts. This would result in Adorno's account taking place not merely at the beginning of some human history, but rather at the beginning of each individual's history. The phylogenetic becomes ontogenetic.

One might object to this that, rather than the formation of concepts being repeated for each individual, the generation of concepts can be explained in terms of the reciprocal engagement of the child with its parents. Such an account would share much with Honneth's use of Winnicott (Honneth 2005: 98 -106) and would have the further virtue that the social universality of conceptual arrays could be explained in terms of the child's synchronizing his conceptual faculties to his parent's. This familial influence, then, could be posited as one of the myriad factors which serve to ensure that the individual's conceptual array is brought into line with society's. However, this cannot serve to explain the initial formation of the conceptual mediation of experience, just because Adorno denies the innate presence of conceptuality. As there are no innate concepts, the child's initial form of experience will be discontinuous (ND: 46 / 56). As such, it would appear impossible for familial influence to take place at this level, just insofar as a discontinuous experiential field would provide no way for the child to enduringly identify and individuate, and hence form a dialogical relationship with, his parents. In initially ordering his experience then, through forming concepts, the child is alone – he is cut off from any influence. Therefore, Adorno's account in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is repeated – the child is placed in the same position of 'terror' as the 'primitive'.<sup>17</sup> So, we should see Adorno's account as in fact ontogenetic, positing the initial terrified formation of concepts from non-conceptual experience as being repeated for each individual.<sup>18</sup>

Through understanding the initial formation of concepts as being an ontogenetic clash between discontinuous experience and self-preservation, we have mitigated somewhat the appearance of the genetic fallacy in Adorno's theory of concepts as self-preserving. We can see these initial concepts as self-preserving just because they stem from the clash between pragmatic interests and experiential discontinuity.

## 2.5 Self-Preservation

However, understanding Adorno's account as ontogenetic only serves to eliminate *this*

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<sup>17</sup> This is not to deny that there is a role for familial influence on Honneth's model. However, it simply cannot be used to explain the initial acquisition of concepts.

<sup>18</sup> Adorno's work does contain exegetical support for this position also- 'Humanity had to inflict terrible injuries on itself before the self – the identical, purpose-directed, masculine character of human beings – was created, and something of this process is repeated in every childhood.' (DE: 26).

genetic fallacy. Even on the ontogenetic account, the genetic fallacy is recreated elsewhere in Adorno's theory. This higher-level genetic fallacy occurs when we consider those concepts which are 'non-basic', which is to say not plausibly related to the individual's initial formation of self-preserving concepts. Concepts which are sufficiently recondite to be non-basic would largely be cultural concepts, such as aesthetic, moral and religious concepts. These concepts are non-basic just because an initial, terrified, attempt to structure discontinuous experience would not seem to have reference to them.

So, for each individual, we have a plausible relationship between a given set of basic concepts ('basic' in the sense given above) and self-preservation. However, the initial genetic fallacy relating to the phylogenetic reading of Adorno is now, on the ontogenetic reading, repeated for each individual – while the basic concepts are plausibly related to self-preservation, *once these basic concepts are in place*, there seems to be no plausible reason to link the subsequent non-basic concepts to self-preservation.<sup>19</sup> If the individual, at the beginning of his personal history, is forced to personally form concepts in accord with his requirement for self-preservation, the question remains what ensures a) that the ongoing process of concept formation takes place in accord with the demands of self-preservation and b) that the basic concepts, having been formed in accord with self-preservation, continue to be employed in a self-preserving manner. As such, a genetic fallacy still appears to be at issue here.

However, this is in fact more reflective of infelicitous expression on Adorno's part than of a genuine philosophical error. Adorno does in fact have a more developed position which allows him to shore up the universality of the employment of concepts in a coercive, self-preserving manner. This more developed position involves Adorno's sociology.

## **2.6 Sociology and Self-Preservation**

Adorno's sociological thought is a considerably large area of his body of work which I cannot hope to address sufficiently here. However, of the three definitive statements of his thought (*Dialectic of Enlightenment*, *Negative Dialectics*, and *Aesthetic Theory*), the first, the *Dialectic*, was written in close temporal proximity to his more sustained engagements with sociology (his work with Lazarsfeld, the writing of *The Authoritarian Personality*) and accordingly reflects his sociological concerns to a larger extent, in a somewhat compressed manner. This allows us to extract the essentials of Adorno's position, as relevant to our present investigation.

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<sup>19</sup> Nor, indeed, the basic concepts, once formed. Their emergence from self-preserving behaviour entails no commitment on their part to an ongoing project of self-preservation.

Adorno held a distinctively pessimistic view in his sociological work – he took the social whole not to be composed of competing groups, or a liberal consensus maintained by the negotiation of competing claims to scarce resources, but rather to be an increasingly monolithic whole which unilaterally imposed a given form of behaviour and thought. Adorno often referred to this as the 'administered world' (DE: xi). The guiding principle of Adorno's sociological analyses was the positing of society's complete social control over the individual's life and thought. This total social control and manipulation which Adorno posits as real (or increasingly realized, as one chooses to interpret him) receives, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, explanation in terms of self-preservation. Adorno asserts that the social whole maintains its power over the individual by forcibly binding the requirements of the individual's self-preservation to the social structure he finds himself in. This is expressed most clearly in three places in the *Dialectic*. First, Adorno says -

The countless agencies of mass production and its culture impress standardized behaviour on the individual as the only natural, decent, and rational one. Individuals define themselves now only as things, statistical elements, successes or failures. Their criterion is self-preservation, successful or unsuccessful adaptation to the objectivity of their function and the schemata assigned to it. (DE: 21-22)

Here we see that Adorno, in the process of attempting to explain the imposition of a given form of behaviour, draws a vital equivalence between self-preservation and 'adaptation to the objectivity of [one's] function' in society. Rather than explaining social conformity as a result of ideological influence, or appeals to the self-esteem of individuals, Adorno is forcefully relating the coercive power of social structures ('schemata') solely to the individual's most basic requirement, namely his self-preservation. This thought is reinforced -

In the bourgeois economy the social work of each individual is mediated by the principle of the self [...] But the more heavily the process of self-preservation is based on the bourgeois division of labour, the more it enforces the self-alienation of individuals, who must mold themselves to the technical apparatus body and soul. (DE: 23)

Once more we see that the individual's basic self-preservation becomes 'molded' to a social structure, in this case the 'technical apparatus' which governs their work. Finally,

Adorno makes clear that he takes this equation of the individual and society, effected via self-preservation, to be socially universal in scope -

By subordinating life *in its entirety* to the requirements of its preservation, the controlling minority guarantees, with its own security, the continuation of the whole. (DE: 24, emphasis mine)

Finally, we can see here in stark relief the equivalence which (Adorno holds) society enforces between the requirements of its own continuation and the preservation of each individual. Each of the quotes which I have provided as textual support show Adorno attempting to demonstrate that society enforces *behavioral* uniformity, and society's own continuation, through its manipulation of each individual's requirements for self-preservation. What is vital is that Adorno has demonstrated here that self-preservation and even the most recondite features of cultural life ('life in its entirety' seems to plausibly include the cultural aspects of life) are imbricated. For Adorno, then, all life, in the administered society, relates to self-preservation and is controlled thereby. By all life, Adorno explicitly has reference not only to behaviour, but to conceptual behaviour as well -

The exclusivity of logical laws stems from [...] obdurate adherence to function, and ultimately to the compulsive character of self-preservation. The latter is constantly magnified into the choice between survival and doom, a choice which is reflected even in the principle that, of two contradictory propositions, only one can be true and the other false. (DE: 23)

Adorno once again clearly draws a picture of the imbrication of apparently autonomous thought and social structure, this imbrication again being effected through the medium of the individual's self-preservation. Here, he explicitly spreads the claim from *behaviour* to *thought*, and to the most apparently autonomous principles of thought, at that. With this exposition of Adorno's sociology, we are now in a position to answer the two questions raised in the previous section, namely: a) what ensures that the ongoing process of non-basic concept formation takes place in accord with the demands of self-preservation? and b) what ensures that basic concepts, having been formed in accord with self-preservation, continue to be employed in a self-preserving manner? I can now tackle a) and b) in tandem.

We are now in a position to explain not only why *basic* concepts, but in fact *all*

concepts continue to be employed in a self-preserving manner. When we first examined Adorno's ontogenetic account of his formation of concepts, Adorno's assertion that the initial self-preserving impetus towards conceptual thought was preserved appeared problematic. This was just because we objected that the appeal to the self-preserving psychological charge which accompanied the initial formation of concepts could not suffice as an argument for seeing the concept as innately self-preserving. However, from our examination of Adorno's sociological thought above, we can see that a genetic fallacy, of drawing conclusions about innate properties of concepts from the circumstances of their origin, is not at issue. Adorno does not need to give any account of the inherent nature of the concept in order to explain and support the claim that concepts are universally employed in a self-preserving manner. Rather, the social structure, according to Adorno, enforces self-preserving conceptual behaviour by structurally ensuring that the agent must be continually aware that his self-preservation is an issue which must be constantly addressed (DE: 24). This 'subordination of life' to self-preservation allows Adorno's linking of concepts to self-preserving activity to be theoretically justified, answering concern a). The formation of concepts in accord with self-preservation is necessary, just because the agent's life as a whole has been emptied of non-self-preserving behaviour.

This also serves to answer concern b). The concept is constantly employed in a self-preserving manner, just because the agent is constantly required to enact his own self-preservation. There is no innate constraint in the concept itself to prevent the cessation of self-preserving behaviour – it is rather a product of the agent's social milieu. Adorno's sociology allows him to posit the agent as always already in a situation of being forced to preserve himself and exert his mental resources towards that end. Once again, as in the examination of Adorno's analogue of Kant's Transcendental Deduction in the previous Chapter, Adorno has situated the necessity for a given conceptual feature not within the concept itself, but in the pragmatic context in which the concept is situated.

With this broad sketch of Adorno's sociological thought, then, we can see a clear account which appears to support Adorno's implicit reliance on a universality of conceptual behaviour, and the universal imbrication of conceptuality with self-interest. This will serve as a foundation for our consideration of the most pressing difficulty, namely Adorno's reliance on the universality of conceptual *arrays*.

## **2.7 Array Universality and Self-Preservation**

Above, in section 2.5., a distinction was drawn between 'basic' and 'non-basic' concepts. Concepts were termed 'basic' only insofar as they bore a probable relation of



primacy to an individual in his forming an initial set of mediating concepts in an attempt to impose regularity onto a discontinuous experiential field. Those concepts which are either of no apparent function in such a situation, or are higher order concepts which require the initial set, are termed 'non-basic'. I should like to continue employing this distinction, just because the universality of conceptual arrays which Adorno employs seems to run into difficulties of differing natures, according to whether we consider the basic concepts or the non-basic. I should like to consider the problem of the universal conceptual array of basic concepts first, moving on from this to consider the problem of non-basic universality.

## **2.8. Basic Concepts and Universality**

In the foregoing, we have established that Adorno is able to consistently maintain that all conceptual employment and formation takes place according to the requirements dictated by self-preservation – initially due to the conflict between one's basic needs and the discontinuity of non-conceptual experience, and secondly due to the coercive nature of society's structuration, which enforces self-preserving behaviour. We supplemented this account in section 2.4. with a brief argument demonstrating that Adorno's account of the *initial* formation of concepts from a non-conceptual experiential field was ontogenetic. It is this ontogenetic, initial formation of self-preserving concepts which presents a specific challenge to Adorno's reliance on conceptual universality. As the individual confronts a discontinuous experiential field, without any guiding inter-subjective influence, he must form a set of mediating concepts. The question arises as to why this initial, individual confrontation with the non-conceptual, and ensuing formation of concepts, is resolved in each case, for each individual, by the formation of an identical set of basic concepts.

The concept's sole role here is to serve the individual's self-preservation. As such, it would appear possible that an individual could form a radically divergent set of mediating concepts, such that either a) some set of non-basic concepts which are parasitic on a normal set of basic concepts would be unavailable to this individual, who would hence fail to conform to the socially universal conceptual array or b) the aberrant set of basic concepts would be sufficiently aberrant as to preclude any communication whatsoever between this individual and the population at large. Eventuality a) is problematic just because it would demonstrate that Adorno has insufficient theoretical resources to ensure the universality of conceptual arrays which he relies on. His theory of the concept and its formation would just be such that an individual's conceptual set could be bereft of, or differ radically from, some set of non-basic concepts which Adorno requires to be socially universal. Eventuality b) is problematic just because we

do not encounter individuals whose fundamental conceptual set-up renders them radically incommunicable, and Adorno's theory has no way of explaining how this is.

To reformulate the problem, then: our difficulty is that the initial formation of basic concepts is such that its sole object is the imposition of manipulable order onto a discontinuous experiential field. This goal would appear to be satisfiable by any number of conceptual arrays. Moreover, these differing arrays would plausibly preclude some non-basic concepts which Adorno wants to see as socially universal. (For example, a set of basic concepts which did not include perspectival spatiality might preclude an appreciation of sculpture). As such, the formation of an aberrant basic conceptual array would in turn problematize the social universality of Adorno's analyses of non-basic concepts and phenomena which necessitate these non-basic concepts.

An interesting example of a possible divergent basic conceptual array which would satisfy Adorno's requirements by forming a regular experiential space would be Strawson's 'sound-world'. For our purposes, we can bracket a good deal of the detail and interest of Strawson's account, and instead focus solely on the fact that the sound-world seems to meet Adorno's criteria for the initial formation of concepts.

In the Chapter 'Sounds' of Strawson's *Individuals*, Strawson attempts to consider whether the fact that we take material objects as primary in the identification of particulars in our 'conceptual scheme as it is' (Strawson 1990: 59) could not be usurped in some other possible conceptual scheme, wherein the identification of particulars does not proceed by taking material bodies as primary. Put differently, Strawson attempts to show that the epistemological viewpoint which takes 'material particulars' (Strawson 1990: 62) as primary for comprehending 'objective particulars' (Strawson 1990: 62) (i.e., objects which are identified via one's experience, which however exist outside of that experience (Strawson 1990: 69)) is contingent. Strawson outlines a different epistemological process (and hence a differing conceptual array) which is able to satisfy the requirement of identifying objective particulars, without needing to posit materiality as primary.

What makes this attempt of Strawson's, which I shall detail presently, so interesting and dangerous for Adorno is precisely that Strawson does not achieve his goal of a radically different epistemological set-up by means of introducing new categories. In this sense, the conceptual *set* remains identical. Rather, Strawson retains the standard categories and re-tools the relationships between them. In this sense, Strawson posits a new conceptual *array* (by re-ordering the primacy allotted to material particulars in achieving an understanding of objective particulars), which satisfies the requirement of providing continuous experience just as well as the standard array (which continues to take material particularity as primary).

To compress Strawson's account considerably, Strawson achieves the maintenance of the concept of objective particulars, while jettisoning extension, by, as he puts it, creating an 'analogy' of material space within which to house these objective particulars. What Strawson is concerned with, is that the comprehension of objects as objective (i.e., as not being exhausted by one's perceiving them, but capable of existing without being perceived) necessarily entails a given 'housing' (Strawson 1990: 74) in which they can be seen to be sustained, regardless of our perception of them. Having jettisoned material space (within which we usually understand objects as being housed), Strawson creates an analogy of space with what he calls a 'master sound' (Strawson 1990: 76), to different pitches of which other audible particulars are correlated.<sup>20</sup> This, Strawson argues, delivers a sufficient housing, in the same way as material space, to allow for the agent to take himself to be re-identifying particulars (the same particular sounds). Just as one may walk into a room which contains a sound, leave momentarily, and return, and thereby take oneself to have two experiences of one sound particular, so one might experience a sound particular at master-sound pitch *a*, move to master-sound pitch *b* where it is not, and then return to pitch *a* and take oneself, due to the housing of the master sound pitches, to be re-identifying the same sound particular. This master-sound, then, provides us with the concept of particulars having 'absence and presence' at a given point (Strawson 1990: 75).

With this account in tow, Strawson is able to re-position a basic facet of continuous experience (the identification of objective particulars across time) *out* of the conventional conceptual array, and into a radically different conceptual array *while retaining the same conceptual set*.<sup>21</sup> This is so important just because it would appear to loosen the necessity of the basic conceptual array initially formed by the infant. While we can continue to grant to Adorno that a given conceptual set is pragmatically necessary, it would appear, from Strawson's example, that the conjunction of that basic conceptual set and pragmatic goal of self-preservation could nonetheless result in any number of radically differing conceptual arrays. We need an explanation, then, as to why there are no sound-world infants – how do we explain the universality of the basic

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<sup>20</sup> 'One may imagine, finally, that variations in the pitch of the master-sound are correlated with variations in other sounds that are heard, in a way very similar to that in which variations in the position of the tuning-knob of a wireless set are correlated with variations in the sounds that one hears on the wireless.' (Strawson 1990: 76).

<sup>21</sup> While Strawson takes himself to have replaced space with 'an analogy of space' (Strawson 1990: 75), and hence not the category of space itself, I do not take this to be particularly compelling. What Strawson presents us with is the category of space re-positioned without reference to visibility or extension. He takes such an alteration to be a forfeiture of the concept – equipped with our distinction between arrays and sets, however, we can rather take it to be the same set, merely with radically altered determining relations holding in that set.

conceptual array?<sup>22</sup>

Strawson's sound-world is such a problem, then, because Adorno deals with the universality of the conceptual *array*, not merely the conceptual *set*. This is significantly richer than simply the presence of the same set of concepts. For the universality of the basic conceptual array to be satisfied, it is not sufficient merely for all agents to have an identical set of basic concepts. The determining *relationships* between the members of this set must be identical. I take Strawson's sound-world to be an example of an aberrant basic array. Strawson presents such a problem for Adorno, as he allows us to posit a significantly different basic conceptual array, without needing to posit some radically different concepts which no-one has yet held.

So, how can Adorno prevent the formation of basic governing conceptual arrays which are aberrant, like sound-worlds, and the like? A promising move would be to enrich the concept of self-preservation with which we have been operating up to now. If we are able to open up the concept of self-preservation such that some set of concepts are necessary for any self, just given the nature of human experience, we might be able to derive a universally obtaining set of basic concepts from the wholly self-regarding desire for self-preservation.

In fact, this enrichment of self-preservation has already been largely achieved in the previous Chapter, wherein we demonstrated the necessity of a given set of basic concepts for continuous experience (cause and effect, appearance and essence, etc. – see section 1.12's argument concerning the necessity of concepts facilitating a distinction between an object and its presented properties). These basic concepts can be taken to be universal just by virtue of their pragmatic necessity, and the absence of the availability of any functional equivalent which could replace them. This pragmatic necessity is prior to any specificity of the agent's particular goal or desires. In other words, these concepts are a condition of the agent's exercising his will in a non-discontinuous field of experience. In order to enduringly individuate objects at all, concepts of causality and the appearance / essence distinction, for instance, appear necessary. Similar arguments are available for other basic concepts, such as space, time and number. However, recapitulating these arguments serves only to secure the presence of a basic conceptual *set*. The worry introduced by Strawson's sound world is simply that these basic conceptual sets can be present without thereby necessitating a

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<sup>22</sup> While Strawson's example operates without the sense of vision, there is no reason why the presence of the sense of sight should prevent the formation of a sound-world consciousness. The privileging of vision in our epistemological schema is contingent – it is perfectly conceivable that the sense of sight could be entertained but marginalized, and seen as largely a source of pleasure rather than information (analogously to our present employment of our sense of smell, or taste).

particular conceptual *array*. Strawson's sound-world includes the fundamental conceptual set, but the determining relations between them, most notably their forfeiture of the visual in favour of imbrication with the audible, are different. We need to find some manner of explaining the universality of these determining relations.

However, Adorno can now appeal to a constraint which prevents the formation of radically differing conceptual arrays, which nonetheless contain the same conceptual set, by the agent. We find ourselves in a position to introduce what was previously excluded in section 2.4 – namely, an appeal to the role of intersubjectivity in the determining of one's conceptual array. Broadly speaking, an account on this basis could take a developmental-psychological (Honneth 2005: 95-107) approach to arguing that through interaction between child and parent, the child is trained to acclimatize his conceptual lay-out to the parent's. This account is usually employed to explain the child's formation of all concepts, but we were forced to rule this out in section 2.4. However, once the basic concepts have been formed by the individual (*without* inter-subjective influence), inter-subjective influence becomes possible, as experience is no longer discontinuous, and the agent is able to identify and individuate objects over time. Adorno can now employ such an inter-subjective account to argue that once the *set* of basic concepts is acquired, any aberrant array would be inter-subjectively precluded. So, Adorno can derive the basic conceptual *set* from an expanded account of self-preservation. The *array* relations of these basic concepts, however, cannot be determined as universal by this concept of self-preservation. But, while Adorno cannot derive the universality of the array relations between basic concepts from basic pragmatic requirements (after all, Strawson's sound world allows for continuous experience just as well as conventional conceptual mediation), developmental psychology can step in and provide the determining constraint, here.

Reading Adorno in this way has one chief virtue, which is that it allows Adorno to simultaneously maintain the universality and contingency of the governing basic conceptual *array*, whilst simultaneously maintaining the initial necessity of the basic conceptual set. The contingency of the array is important just because Adorno's dialectical and philosophical analyses will be oriented towards breaking and critiquing this array. In other words, while Adorno clearly feels that the conceptual mediation of experience is necessary, and that certain conceptual sets are necessary for continuous experience, it is the obtaining *employment* and determining *relations* between these concepts which Adorno's philosophy critiques<sup>23</sup>. However, if these relations and

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<sup>23</sup> 'Yet the appearance of identity is inherent in thought itself, in its pure form. To think is to identify [...] Aware that the conceptual totality is mere appearance, I have no way but to break immanently, in its own measure, through the appearance of total identity.' (ND: 5 / 17).

employments were *unqualifiedly necessary*, the normative ground for this critique would appear to vanish. However, the conceptual array is *contingently necessary*. It is necessary internal to the social totality, which determines and imposes the conceptual array universally. However, the social totality is itself contingent (it is vulnerable to socio-historical change, and so on). As such, the conceptual array is necessary given the social totality it is found in – but this determining totality is not itself necessary.

This line of thought can be termed successful, then, in that while it retains the strict contingency of concept formation in accord with Adorno's position, this contingency has been sufficiently qualified to ensure that the results of this contingent process of concept formation are both in conformity with everyday experience and are universally instantiated. However, this success is of course only partial. This mitigation of the contingency of concept formation, such that it can be made to yield up a universality of the *basic* conceptual arrays, is insufficient to explain the universality which Adorno attributes to the highly complex analyses which he makes of various recondite phenomena. We must now turn to the problem of non-basic conceptual universality.

## **2.9. Non-Basic Concepts and Universality**

It would be appropriate to here re-state the governing problem of this Chapter. Adorno makes highly complex and obscure analyses of highly complex and obscure social phenomena. These range from philosophical antinomies, to developments in avant-garde music, to immanent analyses of what Adorno termed 'ephemera'. Uniting all of this is Adorno's fundamental methodological commitment that an object, interpreted properly, will be revelatory of its social whole (ND: 25 / 36, 47 / 57). So, then, one can analyze a cultural product in such a way that its apparent conceptual imbrication (the artwork's being a determinate negation of the concept of form, for example) holds *objectively*, for all possible observers. Similarly, Adorno feels entitled to assert that apparently subjective phenomena, such as one's feelings about one's gender (DE: 95) are in fact reflective of a social whole, and this reflection holds true for all other individuals. In short, then, Adorno holds that conceptual transitions effected and noted in even the most apparently subjective philosophical and cultural realms hold *universally* – he traces conceptual arrays, and criticizes these arrays, while holding them to be socially universal. The question up to now has been, how can he reconcile this with a theory of the concept which holds that its form and formation is wholly contingent, determined merely by the demands of self-preservation?

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Here we see both Adorno's admission of the necessity of concepts, and his determination to use these self-same concepts in order to do away with their incorrect employment.

We have been able to answer this question for what we termed 'basic' concepts, just by looking at the basic demands for the formation of continuous experience, and supplementing that with an account of the way in which the conceptual set is acclimatized to the obtaining conceptual array through inter-subjective influence in the course of the individual's psychological development.

However, we have now come to consider the non-basic concepts. These concepts differ radically from basic concepts in that a) they are not a member of the minimal set of concepts necessary for continuous experience, b) they are not plausibly formed through inter-subjective influence<sup>24</sup> and c) they concern various phenomena which are not pragmatically basic. From section 2.6, we have established that Adorno can consistently maintain that all individual behaviour and concept formation, even in the non-basic sphere, is determined by the demands of self-preservation. As such, Adorno's sociology closes the difficulty of relating, say, aesthetic concepts to self-preservation just by virtue of asserting that social structuration enforces self-preservation as an ever-present concern, and so trains all mental activity towards the ever-present concern of self-preservation. The distinctive problem of the non-basic concepts arises solely from the fact that, even accepting Adorno's claim about the imposition of self-preserving behaviour, the stratified and differentiated nature of society entails that the self-preserving behaviour (and attendant concepts) of various individuals will be radically divergent. Put differently, as non-basic concepts are not necessary for continuous experience *simpliciter* (point a)), nor concerning phenomena which are pragmatically basic (point c)) – which is to say, they do not concern phenomena with which everyone has contact in roughly the same way e.g., the ground, the existence of other people's bodies, etc. – there seems to be no reason why the self-preserving activity of two individuals in relation to these phenomena, and the resultant conceptual arrays, cannot differ radically. In fact, it would seem that we should *expect* this difference, given the contrasting and competing relationships which individuals bear to various social phenomena.

While it seems reasonable to extract basic concepts from an *individual's* self-interest in such a way that they can be applied to a *society* of individuals, just due to the basic nature of the concepts and avenues for self-preservation being considered, the same does not appear to be true of non-basic phenomena. The interests of self-preservation diverge powerfully in regard to various social powers and concepts, dependent on one's social position. Adorno himself obliquely recognizes this in his affirmation of the class theory of society (ND: 21 / 32, 42 / 52). If Adorno maintains that

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<sup>24</sup> This is due to the sociological divergence in interests and relationships to processes which I will explore below.

concepts are construed in response to the constantly enforced requirement for self-preservation, and that self-preservation is 'molded' (DE: 23) to its structural situation, then it is reasonable to expect that the divisive class-derived divergences in the requirements of self-preservation will give rise to divergent conceptual arrays. We should expect varying (and in some cases, contradicting) self-preserving interests to render up differing conceptual arrays, just in so far as these concepts are intended to be in service of these self-preserving interests. In the case of non-basic concepts, then, self-preservation *simpliciter* does not seem to be a plausible candidate for the derivation of universally obtaining conceptual arrays.

While uniting self-preservation to the transcendental requirements of the satisfaction of an individual's pragmatic needs secures universality for the *basic* concepts, it would appear insufficient for the *non-basic* concepts. We must locate the determining factor which secures this universality elsewhere. In the following, I will locate this universalizing factor in the object itself.

## 2.10 Non-Basic Universality

We have, then, reached the limit of the efficacy of uniting the sociological explanation with the explanation from the basic pragmatic needs of the agent. In outlining the solution to this problem, my account is fine-grained enough to necessitate some new terminology, the meaning of which I will now stipulate. I will be referring extensively to those determining influences on the formation and employment of the concept (often termed the 'metalogical' element of the concept by Adorno (Jarvis 1998: 153)). I will need to distinguish between this influence exercised on the individual via their full social situation and psychological make-up, and this influence as exercised on the agent prior to that situation and make-up. I term these 'rich determination' and 'thin determination' respectively. The first, 'rich determination', applies to the individual's full specificity, and effects its influence via that full specificity. Axel Honneth provides an especially clear example of rich determination, in his account of reification and recognition as having a determining influence with reference to and via the individual's self-image, desire for prestige, personal projects and so on.<sup>25</sup> The second, 'thin

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<sup>25</sup> 'Reification in the sense of "forgetfulness of recognition" therefore means that in the course of our acts of cognition we lose our attentiveness to the fact that this cognition owes its existence to an antecedent act of recognition. Now, there are at least two exemplary cases of this [...] To start with the first case, in the course of our practices we might pursue a goal so energetically and one dimensionally that we stop paying attention to other, possibly more original and important motives and aims. An example of this phenomenon might be the tennis player who, in her ambitious focus on winning, forgets that her opponent is in fact her best friend, for the sake of whom she took up the game in the first place [...] The second kind [...] derives [...] from [...] a series of thought schemata [and prejudices] that influence our practices by leading to a selective interpretation of social facts can significantly reduce our attentiveness for meaningful



determination', applies to and influences the individual, but does not make use of these higher order, more multifarious, properties of individuals. I should point out that thin determination is not transcendental – which is to say it is not entailed as a condition of the possibility of given experiences. Also important to note is that while the mechanisms and relevant social phenomena are different for each kind of determination (for example, rich determination has a clear relevance to cultural media, whereas thin determination does not) *the social whole is exercised through both*. In each case, the social totality determines the individual – what differs is the mechanism by which this is effected.<sup>26</sup> As it turns out, the problems with the social universality of non-basic concepts that we identified are simply a result of attempting to apply a rich determination model – we can avoid these difficulties entirely through the application of a thin determination model.

In the previous section, then, we in fact discovered that a rich determination model could not explain the universality of non-basic concepts. The derivation of concepts from the individual's *specific* self-preserving relationship to social phenomena failed just because of the divergences in the specificity of various individuals and social classes. What is required is a way of understanding social determination of concept formation and employment at a level prior to the individual's specificity, such that it can bear a determining influence on that specificity. The social influence on non-basic concepts, then, will have to be seen as pre-intentional, in that it will be uninfluenced by the divergent patterns of intention and self-understanding in agents.

Before we make this move, however, it might be objected that the Marxist discourse within which Adorno finds himself has sufficient theoretical resources to solve this difficulty. Innumerable Marxists, beginning of course with Lukács, have posited the existence of 'reification' (*Verdinglichung*).<sup>27</sup> Reification has two aspects, referring to the transformation of 'human properties, relations and actions into properties, relations and actions of things', and the 'transformation of human beings into thing-like beings which do not behave in a human way but according to the laws of the thing-world' (Bottomore et al 2003: 463).

Construed thinly, as a process by which society forces the consciousness of individuals into accord with the form of society, it seems obvious that some type of

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circumstances in a given situation.' (Honneth 2006: 130 - 131)

<sup>26</sup> What will become clearer later, but unfortunately I will have little space to explore, is that Adorno's cultural analyses (which often look as if they necessitate a rich determination model) in fact *require* and *rely* on the existence of a thin determination model. Thin determination models secure the social universality which rich determination models cannot.

<sup>27</sup> Marx's analyses of commodity fetishism in *Capital* can be read as an early analysis of reification; however Marx does not explicitly employ the term *Verdinglichung*. The *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie* also contains early intimations of the concept of reification.

account of reification *is* in fact at issue in Adorno. Indeed, if one re-examines Adorno's talk of the coercive use of self-preservation to 'mold' individuals (DE: 23) we can see that Adorno is employing an account on this model. Furthermore, Adorno has frequent explicit recourse to the term 'reification' in his major works (DE: 23, 130, 163, 170, 191, 195; AT: 36, 129, 130, 153, 222, 392; ND: 190 / 191, 374 / 367). So, it is undeniable that reification is at issue. However, Adorno has, I contend, an incredibly unusual understanding of the term reification, which diverges strongly from its conventional employment. Reification is conventionally understood as a material phenomenon, emerging due to the nature of the process of commodity exchange. In Marx's analysis of reification in *Capital*, for example, the reification of objects, such that they bear human properties like exchange value as if they were intrinsic, natural properties, is the result of the way in which commodity exchange is organized (Marx 1908: 42). Reification, on this reading, is the upshot of material processes. Similarly, reification's influence on the agent's consciousness derives from the agent's subordination to material practices of exchange (Lukács 1971: 89). The agent's interaction with these material practices enforces a particular form of consciousness.

However, Adorno does not understand reification, in either of its two aspects, to operate in this way. He rather understands reification to be an epistemological tendency of the agent. Reification, for Adorno, is the propensity of the individual to accept concepts as exhaustively modeling their object. In other words, reification is for Adorno equivalent to what he calls 'identity thinking' – the forgetting of that which does not correspond to the concept.<sup>28</sup> Jarvis characterizes reification for Adorno as 'the conversion of a process into a thing; particularly the presentation of social process as the property of a thing' (Jarvis 1998: 191). What Jarvis does not note is that this misidentification, the occlusion of the mediating process, can *only* be a product of the agents taking the concept to exhaust its object. This is so just because the object for Adorno is always already a testament to its social mediation. Its immediacy, properly related to, opens onto comprehension of the mediacy which produced it (see sections 2.13 – 2.14). As such (contra Lukács and Marx) reification cannot be *merely* a social process which effects the translation of processes into things. Marx, for example, attempts to understand reification as the consequence of a material process, which, just due to this material process, results in processes becoming 'stamped upon' objects, reified into apparent properties of objects (Marx 1908: 42 – 43). For Marx, the experience of objects is mystified and obscured by material processes. However, Adorno cannot understand reification in this manner, just due to his assertion that

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<sup>28</sup> Hence 'all reification is a forgetting' ((DE: 191)

things, correctly related to, display the mediation which gave rise to them. Adorno (ND: 13 / 25) holds that simple 'full, unreduced experience' of the object will reveal its mediation. As such, the object, for Adorno, is an anti-reifying force (if experienced fully). This being so, reification cannot be identified with some property of material processes (or properties of objects, resulting from these process), but rather with an epistemological error which blinds us to the true nature of those material processes (which even objects testify to). The translation of mediacy into immediacy, which reification refers to, is thus not the consequence of some material process in *Marx's* sense, but is more generally an *epistemological* flaw in the concept which entails a neglect of the true nature of its object. To reiterate, then, as the object for Adorno bears on its face the mediation which gives rise to its immediacy, reification cannot be, for Adorno, a property of material processes which conceal mediating processes by making them into the immediate properties of things. The conversion of mediacy into experienced immediacy (reification) must not be identified with a property of the object, therefore, but rather with a property of the agent. Therefore, reification is for Adorno equal to identity thinking – it is the occlusion of the true mediacy of the object, by taking the concept to exhaust the object.

This interpretation of Adorno's use of the term reification, although quite heterodox, is also found in Gillian Rose's *The Melancholy Science*. Rose has a closely related understanding of reification. Rose understands reification to take place by means of the identification of the concept with its object -

Identity thinking is reified thinking [...] Identity thinking makes unlike things alike. To believe that a concept really covers its object, when it does not, is to believe falsely that the object is the equal of its concept. [...] It is the way unlike things appear to be identical or equal, and the mode of thinking which can only consider them as equal, which is reification as a social phenomenon and as a process of thinking for Adorno. (Rose 1978: 46)

[Adorno sometimes posits] 'complete reification': the concept's apparent identity with its object has become unbreakable. (Rose 1978: 48)

Here, Rose identifies reification as when the concept is taken to exhaust the object, but in fact does not. As such, Rose ties in reification with the agent's propensity to take the concept to exhaust the object. In this aspect, Rose's account of reification is very close to my own.

Rose's account differs from mine in that, rather than identifying reification with

an inherent propensity of the part of the agent to presume identity between concept and object, Rose identifies reification as obtaining whenever this presumption of the agent fails to map onto the world. In other words, Rose sees reification as taking place whenever I apply a concept which imputes properties to an object which the object does not 'have "by itself"' (Rose 1978: 47). When the agent presumes adequacy between concepts and objects, and this adequacy does in fact hold, my thought is in fact non-reified.

This difference, however, is largely terminological. I take it that the agent is always already engaged in a project of attempting to exhaustively model the world employing his concepts, and I term this 'reification'. However, I take it that should the imposition of self-preserving behaviour be removed from the agent, and the agonism of the mediation of the object be removed (cf. section 3.8), then this reifying tendency of the agent will no longer result in misunderstanding of the object. Rose would term this state of affairs 'non-reified' – I would term it a state in which reification was at work, but benign. (There are other, more troubling differences between Rose's account and mine – most notably her identification of the non-reified and reified properties and concepts of objects with 'use-value' and 'exchange-value', respectively – but they are not presently relevant).

There are two things which are vital to note at this stage. The first is that reification, as laid out by Adorno, is not a contingent form of determination. Adorno does not see reification as contingent, but in fact an inherent property of self-hood ('The correlative of intention is reification' (AT: 354)). We have backed up this view of Adorno's in Chapter 1, where we discovered that conceptual mediation was necessary for continuous experience. In order for concepts to mediate experience, it is essential that they are reified (in other words, present themselves as exhausting their object). This conceptual mediation is prior to, and a condition of the possibility of, experience. As such, the concept attempts only to grasp and impose continuity onto experience, and is prior to even the possibility of doubt concerning the concept's sufficiency. The concept's mediation of experience is an operation prior to the experiential field within which doubt concerning this operation can arise. Reification, then, is not inherently a form of social influence – the agent always already, constitutively, takes concepts to exhaust the properties of the object (it is art and philosophy which will break this constitutive tendency of the self).

As such, for reification to be social influence, there must be a social determination of *what concepts there are* for the agent to mistakenly take to be exhaustive. This brings me to the second point. As Adorno does not understand reification to be *strictly* a form of determination at all reification cannot be introduced

here alone to explain the social universality of non-basic concepts. Adorno's variety of reification tells us about the individual's acceptance of concepts, but it does not explain how the individual comes into ownership of these concepts. As such, reification is not, for Adorno, inherently a medium for social determination at all. This is so simply as reification has no determining influence on which concepts the agent has in the first place. Rather, it can only affect how these concepts are understood and employed by the agent. So, reification is in a sense a necessary epistemological component for Adorno – it is not in itself determinative of the conceptual set of an agent's conceptual array. As such, Adorno's concept of reification cannot suffice on its own to explain social determination. We need an account of how society influences the concepts which the agent comes to form, which then go on, via reification, to be mistaken as somehow exhausting their objects.<sup>29</sup>

## 2.11 Setting Out the Solution

Let us review what has been established up to this point. We established that the formation of concepts was, for Adorno, an imposition and search for manipulable regularities which could allow the individual to control his environment. Adorno expressed this quite baldly in terming the concept an 'idea-tool' (DE: 31) which gives regularity and control to the agent's environment. The process of concept formation, then, was the imposition of experiential continuity. These concepts become reified just insofar as these regularities are held to exhaust the object.

Our examination of Adorno's sociology (section 2.6). allowed us to see that this self-preserving imposition of experiential regularity does not only apply to some initial stage in the agent's life, but is in fact an ongoing process. The individual is continually compelled to create concepts in this manner, so that he can control and manipulate the structure in which he is situated (the difference being that this structure is increasingly determined by social phenomena, rather than merely natural ones).

This self-preserving search for and imposition of experiential regularity could not be forced into yielding universal non-basic concepts through rich determination, just

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<sup>29</sup> I realize that this is a heterodox interpretation of Adorno's use of reification. Please note that my claim that Adorno takes identification of an object with its concept to be constitutive of experience (this identification I have termed 'reification') still holds, regardless of whether my naming this 'reification' is justified. Adorno makes his commitment to this quite clear, e.g. - 'We can see through the identity principle, but we cannot think without identifying. Any definition is identification.' (ND: 149 / 152). As such, if my interpretation of Adorno's theory of reification is incorrect, my thesis is unaffected. What I have termed 'reification' will still remain a facet of Adorno's theory, which I can accommodate under a different name. If Adorno does in fact have a conventional understanding of reification, I have given an account of why it should not be seen as playing a role relevant to the present topic of investigation, regardless of what Adorno may have intended.

because the *specific* interests of the self-preservation of individuals diverge. The solution to this problem, then, is to see the determining influence not at the level of the specificity of the individual's self interest (rich determination) but at the level of the regularities from which the individual forms his self-preserving concepts. If concepts are formed from the imposition and discovery of experiential regularities and if this is impelled by self-preservation, then self-preservation (in attempting to unify experience in accordance with these regularities) is prior to the specificity of the individual's needs for self-preservation. Which is to say, at the point at which the individual attempts to form a concept of the object such that it unifies experience and is a model of the regularities of that object, the specific, rich relation of the individual to that object is not currently at issue. Thus, if we can see social influence as being effected at the level of these experiential regularities from which concepts are continually being drawn and formed<sup>30</sup>, then we have an account of thin determination which can ensure the social universality of the non-basic concepts while maintaining Adorno's theory of the concept as being the reflection of the individual's self-preserving impetus. Both *the way* and *that from which* the agent forms his concepts would be socially determined. With a universally socially determined process (self-preserving manipulation of regularities) and universally socially determined material for that process (the regularities from which each individual forms their concepts, determined via thin determination), we can ensure the social universality of conceptual arrays.

We will be able to ensure the universality of non-basic concepts by positing two universal determining influences. The first of these will be the determination of the way in which concepts are formed. This has already been achieved in section 2.6, where we saw that Adorno's sociology entails that all individuals form their concepts according to the demands of self-preservation. As such, we already have a universally determined process of concept formation. I will now posit a universal determining influence on the subject of that process of concept formation – i.e., experience of the object, from which concepts are formed. This influence will ensure that the experiential regularities presented by the object will be the same for each individual. As a result, the universality of non-basic concepts will be secure just because the process of concept formation, and the material on which this process is exercised, will be identical for every individual within the social totality.

This latter form of universal determination is my proposed 'thin determination'. In order to begin establishing it as a plausible notion, I first need to make plausible the

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<sup>30</sup> Adorno sees life as being continually compelled into self-preservation and adjustment to one's social milieu (DE: 21 - 24). As such, the concept is not formed once but, through the continually enforced need for self-preservation, remade over and over again.

idea that the object's presented regularities are capable of being determined by society. I will do this in the next section, by examining Adorno's theory of the social mediation of experiential immediacy.

## 2.12 The Object and Totality

O'Connor notes, in his examination of *Negative Dialectics*, that Adorno holds that the social totality 'has a determinative influence on objects' (O'Connor 2004: 59). This 'determinative influence' lies in the social totality compelling the agent to form a given concept of an object (O'Connor 2004: 59 – 60). O'Connor here identifies a crucial feature of Adorno's philosophy. The object is bereft of 'inherent conceptuality' (O'Connor 2004: 59) and, as O'Connor puts it, the social totality provides the 'theater' (O'Connor 2004: 60) in which the objects are invested with these concepts. I will maintain this reading of the object's conceptual properties as being determined by the social totality – however, in rendering this as *thin* determination, I will be able to finally secure Adorno's employment of the social universality of non-basic concepts.

First, however, I just want to support O'Connor's contention that Adorno takes the social totality to be determinative of the immediate appearance of the object. This position is, on my reading, one of the fundamental underpinnings of the entirety of *Negative Dialectics*. There are a good number of places, however, where Adorno makes this explicit. Two extracts, which combine to provide a solid support to O'Connor's position, are the following-

The object opens itself to a monadological insistence, to a sense of the constellation in which it stands: the possibility of internal immersion requires that externality. (ND: 163 / 165)

[Ideology is] the surreptitious acquisition by indirect things of a directness vested with the authority of absolute, unimpeachable, subjectively evident being-in-itself. (ND: 82 / 89)

The first extract demonstrates only that Adorno takes the object to contain, and be constituted by, the social totality. However, the second extract demonstrates that Adorno believes that mediating influences (the social totality) effects an ideological influence on individuals simply by making mediacy appear as if immediate. Put differently, Adorno here explicitly says that immediate experience of objects ('things') is in fact constituted by mediacy. Adorno baldly expresses the social totality's determining influence in *Negative Dialectics* -

[T]he whole which theory expresses is contained in the individual object to be analyzed. What links the two is a matter of substance: the social totality. (ND: 47 / 57).

This quote is particularly useful because it confirms that the social totality determines the individual object, and also that this determination of the social totality is *available* for analysis. What is emerging here is a two-tier theory of the influence of the social totality. On the one hand, it is determinative of the immediate appearance of the object to the perceiver ('[T]he individual has no experience, nor any so-called empirical material, that the universal has not predigested and supplied.' (ND: 313 / 307)). This immediate aspect is taken by the agent to be exhaustive of the object, and moreover exhausted by the concept allotted to it. We might term this the delusive aspect of the determination ('delusive determination' for short) – the social totality inculcates and maintains an incorrect epistemological orientation.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, the object's determination by the social totality also stores up a latent critique of that delusive determination. Which is to say, the same determination which misleads, is always already capable of being analyzed in such a manner that this delusive determination becomes visible, and the true form of the object's determination becomes clear. This second role of the social totality we will call the revelatory aspect of the determination ('revelatory determination' for short).

This determining role of the social totality will provide the theoretical material for justifying Adorno's employment of socially universal non-basic concepts. The previous section has already provided an argument for the impossibility of deriving this justification from a rich determination. However, I should like to reinforce this thought with reference to the determining power of the social totality, and show that the social totality's determination must be thin, and not rich. While the social totality is a unified collection of determining relations between social phenomena and so has a single, determinate, form, this single form is still internally differentiated according to the perspective of each of its constituents. Which is to say, while the totality does have a single form, this form appears and operates differently from each individual's perspective, dependent on their place in this totality.<sup>32</sup> As such, if we see the social

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<sup>31</sup> 'The theory of second nature, to which Hegel already gave a critical tinge, is not lost to a negative dialectics. It assumes, *tel quel*, the abrupt immediacy, the formations which society and its evolution present to our thought; and it does this so that analysis may bare its mediations to the extent of the immanent difference between phenomena and that which they claim to be in themselves.' (ND: 38 / 48)

<sup>32</sup> 'In Mannheim's late version of sociological relativism, which fancies that scientific objectivity



totality's determination as rich, we will run into the same problem encountered in section 2.9. Namely, that the complex of relations and personal projects engendered by self-preservation borne by each individual in the social totality will be relative to their position in that totality. As such, the totality's rich determination (through appeal to the individual's specific interests, drives, etc.) of the object as it appeared to the individual would have different results from individual to individual due to the differing affective specificities of different individuals caused by their place in the social totality. By seeing the social totality's determination as thin, and hence bypassing the individual's specificity, the problem of perspective disappears, and the social totality as a whole can be instantiated in the object.

In interpreting the totality's dual (delusive and revelatory) determination of the immediate appearance of the object as thin, then, we will finally have established a theoretic basis for the social universality of non-basic concepts. To show this, I will explain the delusive and revelatory determinations in turn as varying consequences of a single thin determination.

### **2.13 Delusive Determination**

As I begin, it would be helpful just to review the meaning of thin determination. Thin determination is the influence on the agent which bypasses the individual's affective specificity. As such, thin determination does not appeal to or employ the agent's self-conception, desire, etc. Now, Adorno's claim that the immediate appearance of the object is socially determined would seem to fit this model of thin determination. We saw, in our recap in section 2.11, that Adorno is able to hold that concepts are universally employed and formed according to the agent's desire for self-preservation and controlling manipulation of the environment. This is due to the fact that, according to Adorno's sociology, society inescapably enforces self-preserving behaviour at all times. Being formed according to self-preservation, these concepts are formed in accordance with the optimal method of cognizing the manipulable regularities in the experiential field (cf. Chapter 1). This serves to posit the *process* of conceptual formation as identical in nature for all agents.

If we see the social totality as determining the appearance which the object

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might be distilled from the different perspectives of the strata of a "freely suspended" intelligence, the factors are reversed: the conditioning becomes the conditioned. In fact, the law that governs the divergent perspectives is the structure of the social process as a preordained whole' (ND: 36 – 37 / 47). Here in the course of his response to Mannheim's sociological relativism, Adorno makes clear that society has a non-relative, determinate structure which enforces 'divergent perspectives'. This serves as a recognition on Adorno's part that although the social totality is a unified whole, it creates divergent perspectives within itself.

presents immediately to the individual as he encounters it, then we have a clear case of social influence on the agent of the thin determination type. By determining the regularities the agent's self-preserving concept formation deals with, the social totality can determine which concepts are formed. This determination is thin just because the agent is not influenced according to his affective specificity, but rather at the founding level of his epistemological practice (i.e., forming concepts according to manipulable regularity). As determination takes place at this fundamental level, its influence can apply identically to all agents. It determines the *material* worked by the process of conceptual formation, and ensures it is identical for all agents. Whenever two agents come to conceptualize an object, their processes of conceptualization and the experience of the object from which their concept is drawn are identical. As such, we can assert that the resultant concepts will be identical. Using thin determination in tandem with Adorno's sociological theory of self-preservation, we have secured the universality of non-basic concepts.

But how does this thin determination of the object take on a delusive aspect? What Adorno needs is a theory of how society can determine the agent's concepts of objects and of social phenomena whilst simultaneously concealing and distorting this self-same determination. This can be explained by appeal both to Adorno's sociology, and his theory of reification.

As we saw in section 2.10, Adorno takes reification to be the agent's propensity to take the concept to be an exhaustive modeling and accounting for its object, rather than merely a pragmatic construct. In order for this reifying tendency to result in the delusive concealment of the true grounds of objects, all that is necessary is for the pragmatically relevant properties of a given social phenomenon to diverge from its full nature. It is the self-preserving impetus which occasions the formation of concepts, and it is the socially determined immediacy of the object which provides the material on which this formation of concepts works. So, if for any object its relevance to the agent's self-preservation has no reference to, or diverges from, its true social imbrication, the resultant concept (having reference only to the object as relevant to immediate self-preservation) will be delusive, as it will not take in the object's broader mediation with the social whole which is not *immediately* relevant to self-preservation.

We might see a clear example of this in Marx's analysis of 'free' labour. For the agent, the absence of indentured labour, the reciprocal signing of a contract upon beginning work, and so on, denote the free exchange of labour (Marx 1908: 147). Most importantly, in the context of Adorno's philosophy, it is imperative to the agent's survival (as well as that of society's) that he *behave* as if his labour truly were free (Marx 1908: 147, 152). As such, society compels the formation of a concept of labour which is

arrayed with the idea of its being free. However this is incorrect; the putative 'free exchange' of labour is asymmetrical – the purchaser of labour needs to make his purchase only in order to enlarge his capital (Marx 1908: 147), whereas the labourer must sell his labour in order to provide for his own subsistence (Marx 1908: 152). The genuine freedom with which labourer and employer engage in contracts conceals the compulsion under which the labourer makes this contract, and the social organization which enforces this compulsion. Using this simple test case from Marx, then, we can see that if an object is, in its immediacy, determined by the social whole, then the concept of the object becomes delusive just because the individual's processing of that immediacy only has relevance to his immediate self-interest (selling his labour), which ignores the larger social whole in which he and the object are imbricated (the social organization which makes selling his labour linked to his survival).

This, then, forestalls the following objection. It could be objected that reification need not necessarily result in *delusive* concepts, just because the agent's taking the concept to exhaust the object might in fact be contingently an accurate reflection of the world as it is. Even though the agent may take his concepts to exhaust the object due to reification, it might nevertheless be the case that the object has no properties outside those captured by the concept. The above paragraph defeats this objection just because, even ignoring Adorno's more complex analyses of the impossibility of adequate concepts, we can see that the sufficiency of the concept is *necessarily precluded* by the divergence between immediate self-preservation and the social whole within which this self-preservation takes place.

I should point out that in the example from Marx, the relevance of self-preservation is obvious (the need to earn wages). Do not forget, however, that our investigation earlier in section 2.6 showed that Adorno theorizes *all life* as compelled to a self-preserving form (DE: 24). As such, the analysis can be repeated for recondite phenomena, like cultural artefacts. In these cases, the compelled self-preserving form of concept formation works on the apparent immediacy of the object (which is thinly determined). The combination of this determined immediacy with the reductive concern for modeling regularities ensures that the formed concept will exclude the larger context in which the artwork's immediacy came to be so mediated. This is just because the larger context of mediation is not immediately relevant to the project of forming self-preserving concepts, and so is not included in the concept-forming process.

So, the combination of thin determination, self-preservation and reification coincide to result in the formation of concepts which take themselves to exhaustively model a phenomenon, while in fact being in ignorance of the greater social context of the determination of the object. This results in what we have called delusive

determination.

### **2.14 Revelatory Determination**

'Revelatory determination' is just the object's ability, once properly related to epistemologically, to inform the agent about the social whole which determines it. As has been shown above, Adorno clearly commits himself to the existence of such a propensity of the object (ND: 47 / 57). While delusive determination instills in the agent a distorted understanding of the social whole (due to the determining influence of the social whole itself), revelatory determination amounts to the object's making available a comprehension of the social whole which caused this delusive determination. This revelation is contingent on the agent's breaking the delusive determination and attaining an ideal epistemological relationship to the object. Seeing the object's immediate appearance, prior to the agent's applying the concept-forming process to it, as being constituted by the social totality, straightforwardly provides an explanation for this revelatory determination. While the delusive determination conceals the true social ground of the object's constitution, nonetheless this true social ground is always testified to by the object.<sup>33</sup>

So, this revelatory determination is presupposed by the delusive determination, and the revelation of the object's true ground amounts simply to undoing the effects of the conjunction of reification and self-preservation, and rediscovering the true immediacy of the object. This true immediacy, as it is created by the thin determination of the social totality, is in fact mediated, and leads to comprehension of this mediacy – '[t]o dialectics, immediacy does not maintain its immediate pose. Instead of becoming the ground it becomes a moment' (ND: 40 / 50).

### **2.15 Ensuring Universality**

So, we have seen that our model of the thin determination of the object by the social totality is consistent with the delusive and revelatory determinations which Adorno holds to be associated with the object. We now need to examine whether this thin determination in fact suffices to secure the social universality of non-basic concepts.

We have seen that the self-preserving method of concept formation is compelled in every individual in the social whole, just by the social structure which enforces self-preserving behaviour in 'life in its entirety' (DE: 24). This, coupled with reification, means that we have a universally obtaining method of concept formation.

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<sup>33</sup> Remember, it is the object's bearing on its face the true social totality which makes possible the concealment of that totality, by virtue of the reductive practice of concept formation employed by the agent, together with the effects of reification, ensured by society's compelling self-preserving behaviour.

What this means is that, for each individual, we can know that they will form and employ concepts in the same way – the processes are compelled to be identical by socially enforced self-preservation, and reification which is a condition of the possibility of continuous experience. If we couple this with our account of the thin determination of the object by the social totality, we are able to ensure that the concepts formed by every agent will be the same. This is just because the social totality determines the immediate experiential presentation of the object, for *every* individual. As such, while each individual employs the same conceptual *processes*, the *material* upon which these processes are put to work (i.e., the experience of the object) is also identical. As such, we should expect an identical result.

This allows us to explain then, why Adorno can employ the concept of self-preservation in such a way as to maintain a universally obtaining conceptual array regardless of the divergences in the specific behaviour required by each individual's self-preservation. This is just because the operation of the self-preserving concept is determined thinly and not richly – the social influence does not address itself at the level of the individual's affects and self-conceptions, but instead at the basic, pre-specific level of the individual's constitutive epistemological processes. I take this, then, to be a satisfactory solution to the puzzle of how Adorno is able to reconcile the contingency of concepts with the necessary universality of conceptual arrays.

A further benefit, which will be of cardinal importance in the following Chapters, is that this account of determination forms the foundation for Adorno's understanding of the nature of aesthetic and philosophical truth, and the relationship obtaining between these two kinds of truth. This thought will receive more attention in later Chapters, but the essential problem which this theory solves is as follows. Adorno, in his interpretation of the artwork, consistently alleges that mere technical analysis of the artwork is insufficient. The formal properties of the artwork must be seen in their wider socio-historical context. The difficulty with this procedure is simply that it seems unanchored. Dahlhaus, (cited in Paddison 2002) characterizes the problem thusly -

[Adorno's methods -] the formal-analytically individualizing and the socio-logically generalizing procedure [are supported merely by] verbal analogies [which] perform the function of hiding a gap which [his] arguments could not close. (Dahlhaus 1987: 244, cited in Paddison 2002: 223)

In other words, Adorno's free translation of aesthetic properties into socio-historical contexts which require philosophical interrogation appears to be unwarranted. The shift of focus from aesthetic autonomy to sociological heteronomy appears forced. We might

twin this problem with Adorno's metalogical analyses – Adorno frequently alleges that philosophical truth requires the dissolution of philosophical categories, and their translation into a socio-historical account. The same difficulty appears to be at issue. Paddison, writing in an aesthetic context, rightly notes that the solution to this difficulty is mediation -

[T]he externality to which [Adorno] points, the heteronomous social other apparently excluded by the blind autonomy of the work, is conceived as simultaneously constituting the material structure of the work itself.  
(Paddison 2002: 223)

However, while Paddison is correct, he is largely silent on how one should understand this process of constitution. While he does append salient quotations from Adorno concerning the socio-historical pre-formation of aesthetic content, and adds that art-works are mediated such that any treatment of aesthetic material necessarily involves an immanent-critique of the employed aesthetic form (Paddison 2002: 226), Dahlhaus' criticism remains not fully answered. This is because Paddison's account, as expressed in the paper cited, comes to a close before formulating a thorough theory of mediation which can accord both with the universality and necessity which Adorno allots to it, and to Adorno's theory of the concept. Our theory of thin determination supplies this theory, and allows us to display precisely how the individual object, be it aesthetically or philosophically considered, can be immanently socio-historically mediated. This Chapter, then, has provided a concrete response to Dahlhaus' criticism of Adorno's aesthetics – the comprehension of aesthetic form (and philosophically considered objects) necessitates reference to its social context simply because that object, as experienced, is determined by the totality. It owes its appearance and behaviour to its determination by the social whole – as such, its proper comprehension *necessitates* the transference of the aesthetic or philosophical perspective to the socio-historical. This will receive further detail in Chapter 4.

## **2.16 Concept Through the Non-Concept**

At the close of this Chapter, then, we have, through the examination of Adorno's theory of the object, been able to close the problem of Adorno's employment of socially universal conceptual arrays. Through examining this problem, we have been able to further examine Adorno's theory of the social control of conceptuality. Further to Chapter 1's establishment of the necessity of conceptuality, we can confidently assert that concepts are not only necessary, but necessarily delusive. The socially enforced

self-preserving formation of concepts ensures that the agent will be delusively determined. The question which will exercise us in the following two Chapters is – how is this delusive determination broken?

### **3. – Truth, Textualism, and Performativity**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The previous Chapter was dedicated to reconciling the contingent, self-preserving nature of the concept with the social universality which Adorno attributes to conceptual arrays. While Adorno posited the conceptual mediation of continuous experience as necessary, it was only through an investigation of Adorno's theory of reification (section 2.10.) and the positing of a process of thin determination (sections 2.11 – 2.16) that we were able to posit the conceptual mediation of experience as being identical in form for every individual. This universally obtaining form of conceptual mediation we termed a 'socially universal conceptual array'.

Through expanding and explaining Adorno's reliance on the universality of conceptual arrays, we were able to throw into stark relief one of the more unique properties of his theory of the concept. This is Adorno's positing of the concept as inherently delusive, or misleading. We saw that any continuous experience entertained by any individual would be determined – via self-preservation, reification and thin determination – to be unable to capture (and to preclude the capture of) the actual state of affairs obtaining in the world. Moreover, we saw that – due to the nature of concepts and that threefold influence on the concept – this state of affairs was not contingent, but in fact necessary. The conceptual mediation of experience was not merely necessary, then, but necessarily delusive.

It is this combination of necessity and delusion which provides the motivating problem of this Chapter. We appear to be in a position where the nature of the conceptual mediation of one's experience precludes the expression or cognition of the true, and the nature of the determining grounds of those concepts prevents any attempt to jettison these delusive concepts in favour of some new, non-falsifying set.

The governing problem of this Chapter, then, will be the apparent impossibility of instantiating the true given the necessary mediation of experience by thoroughly delusive, coercively determined, concepts. While it may seem that Adorno (or my reading of Adorno) has here come to an impasse, in fact this difficulty does admit of a solution. In laying out this solution, Adorno's theory of truth will finally find full expression. We will be able to give an account of what the true is, what it means for a given entity to be true, and of the exact manner in which one must instantiate the true. This will, I take it, serve as a completion of the project of arriving at an understanding of Adorno's theory of truth. This will have been executed largely in a theoretical context, as a method of understanding the truth of philosophical assertions. However, I believe



that Adorno's theory of truth is intended to apply equally – and in the same way – to both philosophical and *aesthetic* instantiations of truth. Chapter 4 will constitute an attempt to extend the theory of truth outlined here into the context of Adorno's aesthetic theory.

### 3.2 Truth via the Concept / Texturalism

We saw in Chapter 1 that we cannot posit the truth as being instantiated, expressed or cognized *outside* of conceptuality, as Adorno has posited the concept as a condition of the possibility of continuous experience. Bearing this in mind, we see that the presentation, comprehension and instantiation of truth in experience must be, for Adorno, effected via the concept. However, as summarized above and displayed in full in Chapter 2, the form of the conceptual mediation of experience is coercively determined to take a given form. Moreover, this conceptual structure is inherently delusive. This gives rise to the odd combination of necessity and delusiveness – experience is simultaneously necessarily conceptually mediated, and necessarily delusive.<sup>34</sup>

As this mediation of experience by a delusive conceptual array is *necessary*, the presentation of truth cannot take place *outside* of this array. It would seem, then, that we are forced to try and effect a presentation of the true via a conceptual array which necessarily occludes the true. While this may sound counter-intuitive it is in fact, I argue, the position which Adorno holds. This Chapter will be dedicated to explicating how Adorno is able to hold that necessarily delusive concepts can be employed in such a way as to instantiate the truth.

### 3.3 Texturalism

This theory of truth, wherein the truth is the product of the employment of necessarily truth-hostile concepts in such a way as to induce them to instantiate the true, is highly complex. In essence, however, this theory holds the true as being effected by a combination of *negativity* and *performativity*.<sup>35</sup> For short, I will term this theory of truth 'texturalism'.<sup>36</sup> In short, it holds the true to be not a given *assertion*, but a conceptual

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<sup>34</sup> Due to the influence of self-preservation, reification, and thin determination, as summarized in the introduction, and explained in full in Chapter 2.

<sup>35</sup> Please note that the term 'performativity' as I employ is intended to have no reference whatsoever to the Austinian sense of performativity and performative utterances.

<sup>36</sup> This name is derived from *Negative Dialectics*. Adorno twice lays out his theory's rejection of conventional forms of truth instantiation in favour of performance and 'texture' - 'The open thought has no protection against the risk of decline into randomness; nothing assures it of a saturation with the matter that will suffice to surmount that risk. But the consistency of its performance, the density of its texture [*Gewebes*], helps the thought to hit the mark.' (ND: 35 / 45)

*performance* which engages the delusive concepts which govern experience and leads them to break-down (through contradiction, antinomy or aporia) and display their own insufficiency. As I will show, this performance is not reducible to a simple *assertion* of the insufficiency of concepts, nor will its being performative entail a reduction in the complexity of the true. Rather, Adorno will be able to posit the grounds of the possibility of this conceptual performance as being sufficiently complex as to meaningfully link up with his own complex philosophical practice.<sup>37</sup>

The texturalism which my reading imputes to Adorno is, I should think, a fairly unique approach to the theory of truth, both in terms of what Adorno takes to be the methodological requirements for instantiating the truth, and the attendant view which Adorno takes on the ontological status of the true. As has been mentioned, this texturalist theory of truth is constituted by the combination of negativity and performativity. While I believe that these two constituents are mutually conditioning, as a means of making Adorno's texturalist theory of truth clearer, I should like to display, with exegetical support, these two features in turn.

### 3.4 Negativity

The assertion that Adorno's philosophy is 'negative' is, perhaps, an over familiar assertion. The assertion is certainly well represented in the Adorno literature. However, the precise meaning (and consequence) of this negativity is not always fully brought out. This is due in part to the competing connotations of 'negativity'. The most salient of these are what I shall call for economy the 'Hegelian' and the 'political'. It is important that we disentangle these notions.

The Hegelian connotation of terming Adorno's philosophy 'negative' lies in its evoking Hegel's employment of determinate negation (most relevantly in the *Phenomenology*). In this Hegelian form of negativity, one approaches the true not by positing a new, self-contained account, but rather by critically rejecting the pre-given. Moreover, this rejection of the pre-given is accomplished without appeal to some theoretic content external to the pre-given under consideration. In short, it is an *immanent critique*, which effects its critique using only those standards presupposed by the subject of its critique. What it is vital to note is that this negation is not merely a simple *denial* of some pre-given theory or information. Rather, the critical rejection which is effected is highly informative. As such, Hegel's negativity here does not simply

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'The crux is what happens in [thought], not a thesis or position – the texture [*das Gewebe*], not the deductive or inductive course of one-track minds.' (ND: 33 / 44)

<sup>37</sup> This is, of course, vital; if the grounds of the possibility of this performance of the true bore no meaningful relationship to Adorno's philosophical practice (which he takes to be true), there would be any number of methodological problems entailed.

abolish a given position, but rather gives a full and rich display of the grounds of the insufficiency of the subject of that critique.

For example, Hegel's critique of sense-certainty (i.e., the position that the world 'contains nothing but sheer particulars that can be grasped immediately' (Westphal 1988: 84) without theoretical mediation) in the *Phenomenology* produces a detailed display of the complex grounds of the incoherence of that position. The falsity of sense-certainty is not merely displayed, then, but is *unpacked*, this unpacking resulting in a highly informative and complex philosophical work. Also important to note is that this productive form of negation conducts itself by way of an ongoing critique of pre-given philosophical and theoretical positions, and abstains from any giving any presuppositions of its own.<sup>38</sup> It is this process of negation resulting in an informative and thorough critique of that which is negated, which conducts itself without relying on any first philosophy, which I intend to signify by 'Hegelian negativity'.

This must be sharply differentiated from the positive, *productive* moment that Hegel attributed to negation (for example, he held his critique of sense-certainty to not only be informative, but productive of a further form of consciousness, namely perception) which must not be attributed to Adorno. Negation, for Adorno, does not have a positive moment, and much of his criticism of Hegel centres about this disagreement (e.g. ND: 158 – 161 / 160 - 163).

If we were to interpret Adorno's philosophy as 'negative' in this sense, then, we would not allege that Adorno was a Hegelian, nor that his work was in any way meaningfully *identical* to Hegel's, but rather merely that Adorno's philosophy refused to posit any foundational truth of its own. In effecting its critiques of other positions, and confining itself to these critiques, Adorno takes care not to employ any explanatorily or methodologically basic 'first philosophy'.<sup>39</sup> In addition, these critiques are negatively *informative*, and go beyond mere blunt denials.

The second sense of 'negative' – the 'political' – is significantly broader, signifying a broader rejection of a given philosophy, political position or creed without

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<sup>38</sup> 'Hegel's defense of his own views about knowledge rests on their resulting from an internal, self-critical assessment of every form of consciousness and on that basis rejecting all alternative accounts of knowledge and its objects [...] he seeks to eliminate the errors but retain the insights of less adequate views through a self-critical process of revision.' (Westphal 1988: 85)

<sup>39</sup> '[D]ialectics amounts to thinking so that the thought form will no longer turn its objects into immutable ones, into objects that remain the same [...] For [logical problems of identity ...] technical terminology stands ready with the customary formula of "identity in nonidentity" [...] But such a purely formal reversal would leave room for the subreption that dialectics is *prima philosophia* after all [...] The test of the turn to nonidentity is its performance; if it remained declarative it would be revoking itself.' (ND: 154 – 155 / 157). The extent of Adorno's rejection of any first philosophy ('*prima philosophia*') is such that any static formal statement of dialectical principles is invalid as it would cause dialectical philosophy, in Adorno's view, to revert to first philosophy by using pre-given formal principles.

any attendant commitment to the immanent nature of that criticism. Unlike Hegelian negativity, then, this latter sense is not incompatible with a commitment to a 'first philosophy' or foundational set of truths. This 'political' form of negativity is well-represented in Finlayson's précis of Honneth's characterization of critical theory -

A critical theory of society must at least give an account of what is *wrong* with the social world or show that it is *bad* in some significant way and that it *ought not* to be like it is. (Finlayson 2009: 12)

This principle, ostensibly a necessary condition for the exercise of a critical theory, is recognizably negative in the political sense. It is predicated only on a rejection of the obtaining society, without an attending condition (as would be necessary for Hegelian negativity) that this rejection would avoid being based on any 'first philosophy'.

As should be apparent, these two types of negativity come apart. For example, should one reject Mannheim's sociology due to a methodologically basic commitment to, say, scientific socialism, one would satisfy the latter, political, sense of negativity, but fail to satisfy the Hegelian form of negativity. It is quite easy to accidentally conflate these two meanings of 'negativity'. To be clear, when employing the terms 'negative' and 'negativity' with reference to Adorno's 'negative philosophy' I only mean to refer to negativity in its broadly Hegelian sense. Which is to say, I hold that Adorno identifies the true as nothing over and above the negation of the pre-given. As already asserted, this is not to deny that this negation will be informative – the negation of the pre-given (be it sensory, philosophical or cultural) will result in the pre-given being unpacked, and displaying the full complexity of those grounds which gave rise to its falsity. However, it is important to note that for Adorno the true never outstrips this unpacking of falsity to become a concrete, simple assertion of truth.<sup>40</sup>

So, in referring to the 'negativity' of Adorno's theory of truth, I am signifying that Adorno does not believe that the true is positively expressible. This reading of Adorno as negative is, as I have said, not new. However, I hope now to explain and reinforce this position of Adorno's, with reference to the preceding two Chapters. This should afford us some support and explanation of Adorno's negativity, such that we need not take it as explanatorily basic.

We have established that Adorno's theory of truth is negative, and we interpreted this negativity broadly in line with the 'Hegelian' sense of negativity. In order

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<sup>40</sup> It is here that Adorno's employment of negativity diverges strongly from Hegel. While Hegel believes that negativity has a positive moment (achieved through the 'negation of the negation'), Adorno by contrast believes that negation is shorn of any positive moment.

to lend theoretical support to this aspect of Adorno's philosophy, I will now demonstrate that the nature of the delusive conceptual array (detailed in the previous Chapter) is such that it necessarily closes off any positive expression of the true.

I should like to do this by elimination. I will consider all the plausible ways in which the truth could be expressed positively, and demonstrate that – due to Adorno's theory of the concept – these ways would necessarily fail. I see the plausible ways in which the negativity of Adorno's philosophy could be circumvented as threefold. First, one might attempt to *mitigate* or *deny* the concept's status as necessarily delusive. If this were accomplished, one would be able to lay out a set of concepts, or circumstances in which concepts could be used, such that the truth could be expressed positively. This way of introducing a positive account of truth will be discounted in section 3.5. Secondly, one might attempt to circumvent the problem of the delusiveness of concepts by voluntarily changing one's epistemological practice. In other words, one might intentionally form new concepts, which do not suffer from the same problem of being delusive as the concepts presently employed. This possibility is discounted in section 3.6. Thirdly, one might attempt to express the truth positively just via simple predicative statements about objects. One might correct a simple misapplication of a predicate to an object (for example – 'in fact, that tower is not octagonal, but hexagonal'), or make simple assertions about the world ('grass is green'). Discounting this possibility (in section 3.7) will also entail a consideration of the relationship of Adorno's theory of truth to the truth conditions of simple propositions (see section 3.8). These three candidate accounts having been defeated, I will then take it that Adorno's theory of the concept comprehensively excludes any possibility of the positive expression of the truth. Hence, we will have given a full philosophical account of and support to the negativity of Adorno's theory of truth. This will prepare the ground for consideration of the other constituent of Adorno's texturalist theory of truth – namely, performativity.

### **3.5 Mitigating Universal Delusion**

The first and most promising way of construing Adorno's philosophy as allowing for the possibility of the positive expression of the true would be to mitigate the universality and necessity which I have attached to the delusiveness of concepts. One might think that this is flatly impossible; after all, in the previous Chapter– section 2.10 – I construed reification as an inescapable element of conceptuality, for Adorno. However, reification's being necessary does not entail the necessity of conceptual delusiveness. Were these reified concepts freed from the social imposition of self-preserving behaviour, they would cease to be delusive. The reasons for this are as follows. Firstly,

were conceptual employment to be freed from self-preserving urgency, it would no longer limit itself to being merely an 'idea-tool' (DE: 31) intended to make possible the goal of preserving one's self. Rather, it would be free to lend experience continuity while fully respecting the true constitution of the experienced object.

In the previous Chapter – section 2.14 – I argued that the presented immediacy of the object, constituted by social thin determination, was *revelatory*. Properly cognized and perceived, it lead to the comprehension of the social whole which gave rise to it. As such, the proper and false understanding of an object are not differentiated by the absence and presence of thin determination, respectively, but rather by the proper interrogation of that determination. As such, if the agent's process of concept formation were not instrumentalized by self-preservation, it would have the latitude to properly perceive and interrogate the immediacy presented to it. And, if our account in the previous Chapter is correct, such considered interrogation of immediacy would necessarily lead to the web of mediacy giving rise to that immediacy.

The thought then might be that as concepts are drawn from the presented properties of the object, and as the non-self-preserving comprehension of the object leads inherently to its mediating context, the concepts which would be formed without reference to self-preservation would not be insufficient concepts which need to be dialectically employed in order to be true; rather, they would be some unconventional species of concept which *directly* exhausted and expressed the true mediated nature of objects, without having to be dialectically employed in 'constellations', the sole purpose of which is mitigate the insufficiency of conventional concepts.<sup>41</sup>

In this case, reification would not result in the concept's falsifying the object. The agent would take these non-conventional concepts to model the object exhaustively – and, indeed, they would do so. Reification, then, would secure, rather than prevent, the employment of those concepts in such a way as to make possible the positive expression of the true. The removal of the imposition of self-preserving behaviour would be sufficient to remove the delusiveness of the concept – it would not be necessary that thin determination be removed.<sup>42</sup>

So, if the social imposition of self-preservation is ever less than total, we should expect the formation of some given concept or set of concepts which can

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<sup>41</sup> 'The determinate flaw in every concept makes it necessary to cite others: this is the font of the only constellations which inherited some of the hope of the name [i.e., an expression which exhausted its object].' (ND: 53 / 62). See also (Sherman 2007: 243).

<sup>42</sup> It is also *desirable* that we do not commit ourselves to the possibility of the removal of the thin determination of objects. To return to O'Connor's apposite phrase, the concept does not have 'inherent conceptuality' (O'Connor 2004: 59, see also O'Connor 2004: 50). This being so, in speaking of objects 'as they are' without the influence of social content we may be appealing to a concept of naturalness which Adorno's philosophy would not be well-disposed towards (cf Adorno 1985: 28).

unproblematically express the truth positively, by virtue of their being in complete conformity with their object.

However, it would seem that there is in fact no leeway to interpret Adorno as allowing for the existence of individuals who escape being determined as constantly concerned with their own self-preservation. His assertions appear intended to be universal in scope, and are certainly not made tentatively -

Individuals define themselves now only as things, statistical elements, successes or failures. Their criterion is self-preservation, successful or unsuccessful adaption to the objectivity of their function [...] (DE: 21)

In the bourgeois economy the social work of each individual is mediated by the principle of the self [...] But the more heavily the process of self-preservation is based on the bourgeois division of labor, the more it enforces the self-alienation of individuals, who must mold themselves to the technical apparatus body and soul [...] By subordinating life *in its entirety* to the requirements of its preservation, the controlling minority guarantees, with its own security, the continuation of the whole. (DE: 23 - 24, emphasis mine)

If we take these statements, along with my exegesis of them in the previous Chapter, at face value, then it would not appear plausible to posit a mitigation of the universally delusive nature of concepts. However, there is a well-established line of thought in Adorno scholarship which alleges precisely that we should *not* always take Adorno's assertions at face value (cf. (Düttman 2007: 15 – 21), (Leppert 2002: 64)). Due to a few scattered assertions made by Adorno concerning the usefulness of hyperbole (e.g, (DE: 92) .(MM: 126 - 128)), it has been asserted that we should understand these apparent endorsements of hyperbole as applying self-reflexively to Adorno's own work. Rose provides an example of this type of reading -

[Adorno] warns that “dialectical knowledge is taken all too literally by its opponents”. If someone asks that we do not take him literally, then we should, presumably, not take the advice not to take him literally, literally. *To follow the original injunction consistently means both that we must sometimes not take it literally, and that sometimes we must.* (Rose 1978: 17, emphasis mine)

While acknowledging this may seem a 'chaotic principle for exegesis', Rose

claims that 'Adorno usually undermines his own hyperbole and auxesis quite clearly himself' (Rose 1978: 17). However, this putative 'undermining' which serves to tip us off to when Adorno is employing hyperbole is constituted by the presence of 'contradictory and self-defeating' (Rose 1978: 18) moments in Adorno's account. The difficulty here is that understanding given elements of Adorno's account as 'contradictory and self-defeating' is, in a number of places, wholly dependent on a specific, complex way of interpreting Adorno. As such, what Rose takes as evidence of Adorno's not intending to be taken literally – contradictions in Adorno's work – can, on other interpretations (such as mine) be seen as not in fact contradictory at all – and hence do not demand to not be taken literally. An excellent example of this is provided by Rose herself. She takes 'the prevalence of ideas such as "the total society", "the end of the individual", and "complete reification"' to be intentionally hyperbolic as they 'imply no critical consciousness is possible' (Rose 1978: 18). However, with the account of performativity laid out below, this apparent contradiction disappears and, on my reading, there is no need to interpret Adorno as hyperbolic.

The problem here, then, is that my account of Adorno would appear to be vulnerable to an account which posits his core concepts as intentionally hyperbolic (this further account being parasitic on a given interpretation of Adorno). This seems a plausibly threatening objection. As such, rather than simply denying the usefulness or cogency of asserting that Adorno's philosophy is thoroughly or partially hyperbolic, I should like to point out why we *should not want* to understand Adorno, in this instance, as being hyperbolic.

The dissatisfaction which I feel with this line of thought – that Adorno's philosophy is in some details hyperbolic – stems from my concern that this objection is in essence unanswerable. It is clear that my reading of Adorno cannot understand him as being hyperbolic. The previous Chapter has posited, with clear exegetical support, that reification is inherent and hence universal, that thin determination has universal scope, and that self-preserving behaviour is sociologically made to obtain universally. If any of these universal influences (reification, thin determination, sociological structure) were construed as hyperbolic, then my reading would fail to satisfy its desideratum, which is to provide support for Adorno's analyses of truth, which are both socio-historically relative and universally binding. Put differently, along with O'Connor, I hold that Adorno's whole project is to sustain a theory of truth as simultaneously socio-historically relative and yet objective.<sup>43</sup> Were any of these social determinations to be

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<sup>43</sup> O'Connor gives a concise explanation of this facet of Adorno's theory of truth with relevance



not in actuality universal, then Adorno's analyses would cease to hold with their apparent universal social scope, and would instead apply only to those agents who happen to have the same form of conceptual mediation. In this sense, then, my reading of Adorno cannot allow for hyperbole and simultaneously be coherent with its desideratum.<sup>44</sup> However, the proponent of the theory of Adorno's being hyperbolic can posit my desideratum to be a misreading of Adorno's true, less ambitious, project. Such an allegation could not appeal to the text I employ – as I hope to have shown, Adorno does appear to commit himself explicitly to universal scope – but rather to the scattered endorsements of the use of exaggeration, and some ostensible concealed motive of hyperbole lying behind Adorno's apparently sincere assertions. This being so, there is a sense in which any argument ceases to be fruitful, as my antagonist appeals to something to which neither of us are privy (viz., what Adorno 'really meant'). I cannot, then, disprove or *refute* the allegation that Adorno's true intent was to be hyperbolic. I can, however, doubt whether a reading of Adorno as being hyperbolic in this instance is coherent.

At the head of this section I outlined the consequences of reading Adorno as in any detail employing hyperbole concerning the delusiveness attributed to the concept. Were this to be the case, the resultant concept would not necessitate a dialectical employment (such as we see in Adorno's philosophy) but rather could be employed *directly*, as it were, in order to accurately and fully express the truth of its object. While, as I have said, I cannot refute the idea that Adorno was hyperbolic in such a fashion, I believe I can provide a response. This is simply the fact that Adorno's entire philosophy appears committed to the revelation of the falsifying mediation inherent in immediacy and, vitally, the *dialectical employment of concepts in order to reveal this fact*. These 'constellations' which Adorno continually employs do not correspond to the direct positive expression of a given truth, but rather the complex mediation of any given number of concepts, none of which on their own serve to exhaust and completely express their object. As such, Adorno's philosophy is at no point conducted by the direct employment of a concept – rather, concepts are always employed as if inherently delusive and in need of dialectical correction.

The point, then, is that while it is *possible* to interpret Adorno as hyperbolic with regard to the universal delusiveness of concepts, it is not *plausible*. It is not plausible,

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to Adorno's analysis of freedom (O'Connor 2004: 60).

<sup>44</sup> In truth, I also doubt that Adorno in fact intends his own account to be self-contradictory at all, but it is not important that I argue this here. Finlayson provides an enjoyably blunt rebuttal to Rose's line of thought – '[W]e must not fall into the trap of thinking that because [Adorno & Horkheimer] have a dialectical approach (which they do) they welcome inconsistency or contradiction in their own theory (which they do not).' (Finlayson 2009: 35)

simply because the entirety of Adorno's philosophical practice appears predicated on the inherent and universal fallibility of concepts.

As such, I will take it that this suffices to rule out the first form of positivity which could have been seen as compatible with Adorno's account. Namely, the view that his positing concepts as universally determined and delusive may have been hyperbolic. If that view had held true, there would have been some privileged conceptual area, free from self-preservation, wherein concepts would be wholly benign and allow for an uncomplicated positive expression of the true. However, as I have shown, such a reading of Adorno is needlessly contentious, and sits uneasily with his methodology.

This first attempt to secure positivity on Adorno's account was made *within* his account, as an attempt to demonstrate some pre-existing area of Adorno's account which could allow for a positive expression of the truth. In what follows, I will consider two attempts to *force* Adorno's account into allowing for the positivity of the true.

### **3.6 Adding Concepts**

The first of these attempts to force Adorno's philosophy into making space for an unproblematic method of the positive expression of the true consists in the attempt to introduce new, unproblematic concepts into the conceptual array of the agent. This proposed method of introducing a conduit for the unproblematic positive expression of truth into Adorno's account is as follows.

While the previous section has demonstrated that Adorno's philosophy is plausibly non-hyperbolic, and intended to be conclusive in its positing of concepts as delusive, this does not necessarily preclude an attempt to introduce non-delusive concepts. Rather, one could understand Adorno's account as assuredly non-hyperbolic and yet nonetheless not comprehensive. One could understand Adorno's account as accurate concerning the types of concept with which we are conventionally acquainted, but in fact not germane to some other form of concept, which is not vulnerable to these difficulties. In essence, then, one might respond to Adorno's analysis of conceptuality by formulating some putatively different type of concept which could be employed by the agent which was not vulnerable to the delusive influences Adorno identifies. This new concept would be such that, ostensibly, it would perform the same function as the old concept (mediating experience, and so on) while not being vulnerable to the same difficulties (of falsifying experience, and so on). Should this be accomplished, concepts could be employed without thereby falsifying their objects, and thereby would serve as conduits for the positive expression of truth without falsification.

It is not particularly important exactly how such a new concept would be constituted – whether it remained unable to exhaust the object's full specificity but

inherently made this state of affairs plain to the agent (and hence avoided falsifying the object), or was in fact in some manner able to exhaust the object, etc. There is a feature of Adorno's account which allows us to rule out in principle the formation of any such concept which is able to grasp its object in a non-falsifying manner.

This general feature of Adorno's account has already been set out in full in Chapter 2. This general feature is Adorno's theory of reification, and the universality of thin determination and self-preservation. For Adorno, reification is a constitutive element of agency. Reification necessitates the mistaking of a concept for something which straightforwardly exhausts its object. As reification is constitutive for agency, and necessary for the conceptual mediation which creates continuous experience (cf. section 2.10), even if the addition of a new concept to the agent's conceptual array were possible, the agent would necessarily take the new concept – precisely by virtue of reification – to exhaust its object. This discounts the possibility of a concept which could prevent its being delusive by virtue of presenting to the agent the incompleteness of its grasp of the object.

However, this does of course still leave open the possibility of a concept which takes itself to be exhausting an object while actually accomplishing this. However, this possibility is in turn ruled out by the interaction of self-preservation and thin determination. This has already been demonstrated in Chapters 1 and 2. To recapitulate briefly, self-preservation forces the agent into forming a concept from the presented, manipulable regularities of a given object. However, the presented immediacy of an object is itself determined by the social whole, and in such a form as to obscure its true mediated social nature. As such, the concept necessarily models only the presented regularities which are germane to the individual's self-preservation, and so does not model the full mediated complexity of the object. Combined with the influence of reification, the concept will take itself to be exhaustively modeling the object which it in fact is only a partial reflection of.

Just because Adorno's theory of reification, self-preservation and thin determination is not hyperbolic, then, the formation of a concept which is not subject to these influences (and thereby not delusive) cannot be coherently posited.

### **3.7 Primitive Correspondence**

We may feel that Adorno *should* introduce an account of the true as positive just because we have an intuitive grasp on a truth-apt practice which is both positive, and apparently employed universally. This practice is what I shall call 'primitive correspondence', by which I mean the everyday practice of making assertions about the properties of objects and, moreover, the disagreements which these assertions can

entail.<sup>45</sup>

There are two problems introduced by this practice. Firstly, if Adorno is correct that truth is entirely negative, we need an explanation as to why the simple assertion 'grass is green' fails to be true. (As a corollary, we need an explanation of why a theory of truth which excludes such apparently unproblematic statements as true is desirable). Secondly, one might be worried by the fact that *disagreements* over such statements only seem to be possible if all of the interlocutors possess and employ an understanding of the truth as positively expressible. We decide between the two statements 'grass is green' and 'grass is red' just by testing these assertions either against the world, or against what we reliably know to be the case about objects. Neither of these procedures seem workable if we see predication as in some way inherently delusive, problematized or divested of any truth whatsoever. This latter problem, then, sharpens the issue. It would appear that a positive theory of the true is central to much of what we might reasonably term basic human behaviour (public speech about the world). These simple public statements about the world seem inherently bound up with the presumption that they are made true straightforwardly by correspondence with the way the world is. I have named this presumption and propositional practice 'primitive correspondence'. Adorno has to either a) give a compelling reason to in fact see this behaviour as false in a meaningful sense (which would seem a tall order) or b) provide some argument for that positive standard of truth's not interfering with his commitment to the true as being wholly negative.

As perhaps befits a dialectical philosopher, Adorno's account in fact demands that we satisfy both of these (apparently mutually exclusive) requirements at once. I will do this in the following section.

### 3.8 The Attenuation of the True

The entirely reasonable criticism which is being addressed to Adorno is, given his wholly negative theory of truth, how can his theory of truth apply to conventional propositions like 'grass is green'? Being wholly negative, it would appear to be unable to give a determinate account of the traditional concerns of a theory of truth concerning propositions about the world, beyond simply positing them as false. This seems to be a culpable neglect of the intricacy both of the linguistic structure of simple predication, and of the requirements of any conventional linguistic behaviour (ordinary language

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<sup>45</sup> The kinds of practices involving propositions which we might think should be uncomplicatedly true of course includes more than mere primitive correspondence. However, I choose to engage primitive correspondence alone, as a test case, as the reason for its falsity (the holistic theory of falsity) easily relates to and falsifies all other forms of linguistic practices.

use seems to stand in need of a theory of truth as positive). It is of course important to note that Adorno operates outside of the presently conventional 'analytic' philosophical tradition, and hence no more *explicitly* addresses questions of propositional content than Hegel or Fichte. (Excepting certain modern readings of these philosophers – e.g. Brandom). However, this context can only be allowed to explain differences in *emphasis* – if Adorno's philosophy is without defence in his neglect of simple propositional forms of truth, we might consider it seriously compromised.

What would constitute a philosophical defence of this neglect? If Adorno has a readily available set of philosophically motivating reasons why conventional propositions are either not worthy of philosophical investigation, or in fact fall below the definition of truth that we *should want to use* (as opposed to any definition of truth that there may be), then we might view this neglect as in fact legitimated. Conventional propositions would be posited as not satisfying the basic requirements of truth for the theory of truth which Adorno has identified as optimal. This would not be to deny that positing these conventional propositions as true *in some sense* or *from some perspective* would be workable, or even useful. However, it would remain sub-optimal.

Such a defence does seem available to Adorno. It is constituted by Adorno's theory of mediation. Adorno will allege that any simple proposition which presents itself as the sole focus of any 'serious' theory of truth or, moreover, as being 'true' in a straightforward sense, has placed itself outside of Adorno's theoretical context and is thereby invalid. This is so just because, for Adorno, the experience and cognition which is the grounds of the possibility of those propositions is *mediated*. Now, in the course of this account we have already had frequent reference to Adorno's employment of mediation. However, in this context I think it is important to carefully delineate and go over the precise nature of the mediation which Adorno posits as relevant to the meaning and knowability of simple propositions.

The difficulty presently being considered is that simple propositions, which are checked against the world, appear to be true in a straightforward sense. I have claimed that Adorno is able to discount these propositions as true due to his theory of mediation. However, in this instance the employment of mediation is not unique to Adorno's account. I should like to lay out the kind of mediation found in a 'conventional' account, before drawing out the salient differences of Adorno's employment of mediation.

Now, of course on any account of perception, save perhaps naïve realism, the experiential background which serves as the grounds of the possibility of the expression and understanding of simple propositions is mediated in *some* sense of the word. Which is to say that this experience is itself dependent on some mediating factor

which does not show up immediately in that experience. Salient examples of such mediation would be any representationalist account of perception, or any account which makes use of epistemic intermediaries. In either of these cases, the presented experience is mediated by a mechanism (be it the formation of representations, or the operation of the epistemic intermediaries) and set of conditions (the relationship obtaining between perceiver and perceived) which either *make possible* or *constitute* that experience. The experience itself is not *immediately* informative of that mediation (which is not to say that it cannot be interrogated to reveal it); the experience instead presents itself as complete, self-contained and self-constituting.

These mediating factors are capable of breaking down, and hence creating false experiences and attendant false propositions. However, under ideal conditions these mediating factors are not themselves held to bear truth-content – the resultant experiences and propositions are. They are a *pre-cursor* to truth-relevant propositions and states, which are themselves checked against objects and states of affairs.<sup>46</sup>

On this conventional understanding of the role of mediation, mediation serves as a vehicle or mechanism which inculcates a relationship between speakers, sayings and objects. There are two key consequences of understanding mediation in this manner. First, the proposition 'grass is green', so long as it expresses an obtaining state of affairs, cannot be seen to be false in any meaningful way. Secondly, we should expect these types of propositions to be the primary topic of any serious theory of truth. On this understanding of mediation, then, Adorno's negative theory of the true, as applied to basic propositions, seems unintelligible, and his failure to take up the linguistic turn in philosophy appears culpable.

So, we have seen the conventional understanding of the role of mediation, as well as the reliance of the criticism of Adorno on that understanding of mediation. I now want to lay out Adorno's understanding of the role of mediation in this issue, and why this allows him to intelligibly both posit basic predicative statements as meaningfully false, and as allowably true in a way which does not problematize his theory of the true

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<sup>46</sup> This may sound false in light of – speaking very broadly – the lines of thought found in Davidson, Quine or the later Wittgenstein. For these philosophers, the truth of an assertion is ultimately referred to a community of language users. However, there remains a key congruency. The mediating operation of the community / language game is transparent and not truth-hostile (cf my consideration of Adorno's 'agonic' mediation below) and the criterion created by that community / language game reverts to reference. The community / language game functions as the pre-condition of truth-relevant speech, and defines the horizon of that speech, but does not complexly undermine or interfere with that truth-relevant speech once constituted. Due to the absence of agonic mediation, the criteria of truth reverts to an individual and an object, with the community of language users serving as a determining influence which sets the horizon of truth-relevant speech (or sets the language game), but which does not problematize that speech. Once the community has erected a truth-apt practice, the truth internal to this practice reverts to propositions and states of affairs.

as negative.

As we have seen in the previous two Chapters, Adorno not only sees experience as *conceptually* mediated, but as in fact determined by the socio-historical whole. This has been covered in detail in Chapter 2, and is too intricate to be reviewed in detail at this point. Adorno takes any given experience to be determined by and dependent upon a totality, composed of various social, historical and intellectual processes. We saw that the totality determines the object by virtue of constituting the experience of the object. While this determination produces the delusive immediacy of the object (cf. section 2.13), this determination, related to properly, becomes revelatory of the totality which produced it (cf. section 2.14). So, Adorno is committed to the idea that any experience, investigated properly, will necessarily lead to comprehension of the larger context which gave rise to it. To put it bluntly, for Adorno no single proposition can be isolated as obtaining singly between an individual and a state of affairs. Rather, the nature of the proposition that one is trying to comprehend in full forcibly transfers comprehension away from the individual proposition to the social and conceptual whole which is the grounds of the possibility of this proposition.

This is a motivating philosophical argument as to why Adorno can see isolated propositions as falling below a standard of truth he should want to use. It legitimates an attempt to comprehend not propositions, but propositions together with their mediating context. However, as yet it does not legitimate positing these basic propositions as meaningfully false. After all (as briefly explored in footnote 45) there are a number of theories of truth which see individual propositions as significantly mediated by a larger governing epistemic context. Moreover, these theories of truth agree that exhaustive comprehension of a proposition goes beyond consideration of the speaker and the object, and necessitates exploration of the mediating context. Moreover, for these individuals this mediating context is supra-individual (for example, a community of language-users). However, for these theories of truth the proposition itself is not thereby false – rather, the grounds of its being true are simply expanded.

What is it, then, that allows Adorno to posit these basic propositions as meaningfully false? The difference lies not in the scope of mediation, but in the nature of mediation which Adorno allots to experience. You will recall that for all conventional uses of mediation (up to and including Quine et al.) the mediating influence is both transparent – while it does not show up in the experience, it can be easily interrogated – and not truth-hostile (outside of sub-optimal conditions where delusions, hallucinations, etc. can occur). This mediation, then, is benign. The relevant difference for Adorno is that the totality which is operative in the mediation of experience is *agonic*. This agon problematizes the relationship of the agent to the world, and

compromises the knowability of the world. This *agon* of mediation has three elements.

The first element of *agon* is constituted by the social totality's simultaneously creating complexity and preventing the comprehension of that complexity. As we saw in our examination of thin determination, and revelatory and delusive determination, the social totality *constitutes* the object. By virtue of the complexity of this social totality which constitutes the object, the object is itself highly complex, involved in complex mediations. However, the social totality which constitutes the complexity of the object, simultaneously mediates conceptual practices so that they are unable to comprehend this complexity. As we saw earlier in section 2.13, the social totality gives rise to (and sociologically enforces) a self-preserving, reified process of concept-formation which is constitutively incapable of grasping this totality. The social totality simultaneously creates a complex social ontology, and causes the universal employment of an epistemological mode which is incapable (dialectics aside) of grasping this complexity. As such, experience is mediated in such a way that the same social totality which constitutes the complexity of objects enforces epistemological practices which cannot grasp this complexity.

The second element of *agon* relates to the double life of concepts as both autonomous and heteronomous. While concepts and the propositions they make possible may hold themselves to be autonomous, and to be taking place according to transparent rules of inference, and so on, they are in fact caused by and predicated on processes which do not conform to the concept's autonomous self-understanding. Which is to say, these mediating processes *violate* the concepts they give rise to, and cannot be comprehended by them. While the concept produced by the social totality (say, of music) will reify itself into having a determinate, static account of the constitution of its subject (as, for example, in Hindemith's account of atemporal, 'natural' tonality (Paddison 1993: 67)), the subject of the concept is in fact temporally determined and in flux (Paddison 1993: 93). As such, the reified concept both fails to grasp the complete mediating context of its object (due to the influence of self-preservation, cf. section 3.5), and is also falsified over time, as the concept fails to keep pace with the alterations in the totality which produced it. So, not only does the mediation prevent comprehension of the full complexity of the mediated, it also enforces a diremption between the concept's apparent autonomy and atemporal validity, and its nature as in fact heteronomous and socio-historically determined. This is another aspect of how mediation creates a form of conceptuality which is incapable of comprehending its object (in this case, mediation itself). It is this break between the concept and its subject, the difference between the concept and the mediating totality



from which it was crystallized, which gives rise to antinomies and contradictions.<sup>47</sup>

The third, and most important for our present purposes, aspect of this agon of mediation concerns the holistic nature of the social totality. Each concept and object of experience, by virtue of being mediated by a totality, is also bound up with that totality's operations in other spheres. The processes which may facilitate some set of autonomous concepts (like logic, say) may elsewhere close off some access to some other truths. This becomes an especially pointed difficulty when we bear in mind that this social totality has not only theoretic and conceptual consequences, but attendant *social* and *behavioral* consequences. As such, the mediating context within which a 'true' proposition is nested may be false in other areas, even leading to socially disastrous consequences. The truth of an isolated proposition may be made possible by a mediating whole which, taken as a whole, is completely untrue.

This agonic mediation is what enables Adorno to posit these basic propositions (like 'grass is green') as meaningfully false. The grounds of the possibility of those propositions is imbricated with the falsity of the totality which determines experience as a whole.<sup>48</sup> These propositions are false, then, by virtue of their being a constituent of a mediating totality which, seen as a whole, is false. However, it is important to note that this allows Adorno to term these basic propositions as *meaningfully* false, but it does not commit him to terming them *completely* false. Their falsity derives from their ultimate epistemological value – considered exhaustively, with regard to their total imbrication and mediation, they represent an element of an ongoing, false epistemological whole. This falsity of their ultimate epistemological status considered as a part of a whole however, does *not* entail their falsity if considered in isolation. Which is to say, that the statement 'grass is green' can be posited as true *in a limited sense*.

To be clear, the line of thought runs like this. Assertions of the primitive correspondence type can be seen under two aspects. Taken in isolation, the assertion 'grass is green' can be seen as true, just in case grass actually is green. We might explain the coincidence of this assertion with the way the world is in terms of self-

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<sup>47</sup> 'Dialectics is the consistent sense of nonidentity [...] What we differentiate will appear divergent, dissonant, negative for just as long as the structure of our consciousness obliges it to strive for unity: as long as its demand for totality will be its measure for whatever is not identical with it. This is what dialectics holds up to our consciousness as a contradiction [...] Contradiction is nonidentity under the rule of a law that affects the nonidentical as well. This law is not a cogitative law, however. It is real [...] Its agony is the world's agony raised to a concept.' (ND: 5 -6 / 17 - 18). Contradiction is constituted by the law of the external world, which also compels thought to 'strive for unity' (i.e., a seamless, wholly conceptual control of the world).

<sup>48</sup> This idea (of the falsity of the totality) is most concisely expressed in Adorno's crisp rebuke to Hegel in *Minima Moralia* that '[t]he whole is the false' (MM: 50).

preservation. Assertions concerning colour, mass, and so on are sufficiently basic that the interest of self-preservation, as relevant to concept formation, does not introduce any delusive relationship to the object – it instead provides a satisfactory window onto how the object in fact is. Taken in isolation, then, this proposition is unqualifiedly true.

However, the proposition is not, in fact, in isolation. The proposition is bound up with a conceptual array and form of thought (identity thinking) which made it possible.

Knowledge of the object was gotten by virtue of the agent employing concepts in accordance with identity thinking. The same form of thought which *in this instance* mapped onto the world, will entail the falsity of any number of other propositions held by the agent. It will also entail latent contradictions and antinomies in the agent's body of thought taken as a whole. The agent's system of thought, taken as a whole, is false, by virtue of being internally contradictory. Considered as an element of this body of thought, which was made possible and acquired through this body of thought, the assertion is ultimately false.

In essence, then, Adorno has what one might term a 'holistic theory of falsity'. Adorno can allow that conventional propositions on the model of 'grass is green' do in fact, in themselves, obtain and truthfully refer to objects in the outside world. This can be cashed out in one of two ways, dependent on the object. In the example of 'grass is green' we can, I think, allow that this statement is true in an uncomplicated, conventional way. Its truth-maker is the fact that the grass in fact bears the property of greenness. This would be a simple, 'genuine' proposition, in that the grounds of its truth are not wholly fabricated by a human form of life or practice. Alternatively, simple propositions like 'gold is valuable' can also be held to be made true in a conventional manner (as gold actually does bear a property of being valuable), with the caveat that this property of the object is contingent on the form of life within which the object is being encountered. ('Value' is empirically discoverable, but nonetheless culturally relative). In either case, then, Adorno can allow the usual, conventional theories and manners of discussing truth.

However, this comes with a caveat. As already explained, due to the collective conceptual mediation of experience, these assertions, and the grounds of the possibilities of these assertions, are agonic and delusive. As such, they are imbricated in a larger epistemic context which serves to occlude and obfuscate truth. Even if the proposition in question is not in-itself problematized by its epistemic context (i.e. there is no meaningful way to see 'grass is green' as false when taking this proposition in isolation), this proposition was made possible by, and perpetuates a socio-historical totality which entails falsity in any number of any other epistemic areas and applications of propositions. Adorno has a holistic theory of falsity, then, just in so far as

individually true propositions are ultimately false due to their imbrication with and maintenance of a generally delusive epistemic whole.

As such, then, Adorno can simultaneously 'construe and deny' (ND: 320 / 314) the philosophical project of beginning with and focusing on individual propositions. Adorno is in no way committed to denying the coherence, explanatory value or use of the analytic project (and attendant truth of basic propositions). However, he is committed to this project being one-sided and not sufficiently exhaustive. This analytic form of investigation of truth is made false by virtue of its more general imbrication – in this sense, these propositions are false by virtue of their being holistically incorporated in a false system. As such, basic propositions can be seen as both meaningfully false, and true in a way which does not compromise the universality and integrity of the negativity of Adorno's theory of truth. This satisfies both of the desiderata outlined at the end of the previous section.

### 3.9 An Objection

So, we have preserved Adorno's negative theory of truth by demonstrating that it is, in fact, able to posit apparently unproblematic assertions ('grass is green', etc.) as false in a meaningful and (given the rest of Adorno's theoretic commitments) compelling manner. It was also important that we, nonetheless, were able to accord some type of truth to these (ultimately false) simple propositions. This was important simply as a condition of Adorno's theory being intelligible and, moreover, *compelling*. However, while we may have found a coherent solution to Adorno's problem, its terming basic propositions as false still seems open to objection.

By alleging that immediately unproblematic propositions are false due to their mediated imbrication with a false whole, we open ourselves to the objection that we are moving illegitimately between two types of truth. 'In asking about the truth of the proposition "grass is green"', our antagonist might say, "I just wanted to know about *that* – the truth or falsity of the proposition's mediation, grounds of the possibility of the proposition, etc., were not at issue. I wanted to deal with a type of truth limited to the immediate objects at hand.' While not especially complex, this objection does have force. There is a justified suspicion that translating all questions about simple, immediate propositions into complex webs of mediacy is a feat of *legerdemain*, rather than compelling theoretical analysis.

There is a simple way of dealing with this objection, the core of which is the antagonist's demand for the theory of truth to rest with immediate propositions. In making this objection, the antagonist is tacitly appealing to an atomistic picture of propositions. As explained in section 3.8, we are dealing here with an epistemological

picture which confines itself to speakers, sayings and objects. Each of these elements is self-contained, in terms of its content – analysis of the speaker's constitution (as relevant to the truth condition of his propositions) will ultimately end with the speaker. Which is to say, that the way in which the speaker's constitution can interfere with the truth-value of his propositions is confined to facts about the speaker *simpliciter* – his physical integrity, vulnerability to delusion, etc. Similarly, the content of the object can be cashed out solely in terms of that object. (A wrinkle here is introduced with regards to cultural properties of objects, but cf. section 3.8). There is no meaningful way, on the antagonist's picture, that the comprehension of the constitution of each of these objects is not ultimately arrested with that object. This picture of the constitution of the elements of a propositions truth or falsity – speakers, sayings and objects – is coherent, but it is not in accord with Adorno's theoretical context.

The last two Chapters have been a display of the speaker and object's being constituted not wholly by themselves, but in fact by a mediating whole. Neither the speaker nor the object has any content which can be isolated as belonging solely and unproblematically to the speaker, or to the object. As such, exhaustive comprehension of any proposition will *necessarily* lead to comprehension of the mediated context of these immediate propositions. When our antagonist complains he wanted to know about '*that*', meaning an immediate and self-constituted situation, containing only self-constituting speakers, sayings, and objects, we can cogently reply that '*that*' does not in fact exist, according to Adorno's theory of mediation. Adorno simply does not recognize, and goes to some lengths to argue against, the idea that the comprehension of agents, sayings or objects can be meaningfully conducted without reference to their mediating context. This serves to defeat the objection, as its theoretic grounds are, in an Adornian context, illegitimate. It appeals to a self-constituting immediacy which simply does not exist in Adorno's philosophy.

The defeated objection, however, can be finessed. One can grant the existence of the mediating context, but allege that the move from immediate propositions to mediating context was illegitimate. We might cash out this putative illegitimacy like so – *even if* the mediating context exists, and imbricates the immediate proposition, the falsity of the former *does not* translate into the falsity of the latter in any meaningful way. This refined objection, then, would allow for the existence of a mediating whole which is both determinative and the grounds of the possibility of the immediate proposition. However, it would allege that the falsity of that mediating context should not be seen to be in any way relevant to the truth or falsity of the immediate proposition.

In order to be coherent, this refined objection cannot deny that the exhaustive

and ultimate comprehension of any immediate proposition leads to its mediating context. Our reply to the first objection has demonstrated that it *must*, given Adorno's account. As such, this refined objection must say that, while the proposition is false as *an element of a whole*, this does not entail that the immediate proposition is false *in itself* (i.e., comprehended just in its immediacy, without reference to its mediating context). In fact, this refined objection I take to hold, and to not be a *problem* for Adorno's theory of truth, but rather a welcome *elucidation* of it. In fact, one can go further – the lack of autonomy in immediate propositions does not entail their falsity, and nor does it harm their analyticity, either. Which is to say, while these immediate propositions are ultimately determined not by themselves, but by a mediating context, nonetheless one can still hold that analytic truths, like those of mathematics and propositional logic, hold. Adorno himself expands on this in *Negative Dialectics* -

To dialectics, immediacy does not maintain its immediate pose. Instead of becoming the ground, it becomes a moment. At the opposite pole, the same thing happens to the invariants of pure thought. Nothing but a childish relativism would deny the validity of formal logic and mathematics and treat them as ephemeral because they have come to be. Yet the invariants, whose invariance has been produced, cannot be peeled out of the variables as if all truth were at hand, then. (ND: 40 / 50)

Here we see that Adorno believes that the analytically true propositions of mathematics and logic are in fact mediated, and do not possess the universally necessary nature they believe themselves to. They are 'produced' (ND: 40 / 50). However, Adorno does not hold that this compromises their present status as analytically necessary *in themselves*. As he puts it, only a 'childish relativism' would do so. What Adorno *is* denying, then, is that the truth of these invariants holds outside of their mediating context. As he puts it, they cannot 'be peeled out of the variables' – the invariants are 'produced' just by the epistemological contents they rule over. They cannot be extracted and held up as universally true, in any epistemological context whatsoever - as Adorno puts it, 'immutability of truth is the delusion of *prima philosophia*' (ND: 40 / 50). However, *within their context* they remain true, despite the falsity of that context, in themselves (i.e., seen in a limited perspective) and simultaneously ultimately false.

What it is vital to note here is that Adorno posits analytic truths as mediate. This mediacy falsifies analytic truths both because they are mediated by a false totality, but also because this mediacy breaks the universal necessity which analytic truths arrogate to themselves, by positing them as in fact historical. However, this falsity is not

held to overwhelm the truth of the proposition – rather, these truths remain invariant and true in their contingent context. In their case, 'truth has coalesced with substance', (in other words, they are invariant just due to the foundations of their contingent epistemological context), '*which will change*' (ND: 40 / 50, emphasis mine). This mutability, however, does not detract from the fact that Adorno posits them as *true*.

It would seem, then, that we should agree with our antagonist. Adorno should not, and in fact does not, see the mediating false totality as completely falsifying the immediately true. However, it is important to note that the truth of the immediate is always qualified – it exists just on the incomplete epistemological level of the immediate. We remain committed to the idea that *exhaustive* and *complete* comprehension of the immediate proposition leads to its status as a part in a false whole. As such, the immediate can be true *within its limited perspective*. This truth is possible only due to this restriction of the perspective such that the mediating context is 'blocked out'.

This being so, the truth of the immediate is necessarily always over-ruled by the falsity of its imbrication with a false totality. The immediate proposition only shows up as 'true' when not fully comprehended. As such, to return to a thought expounded in the previous two sections, the truth of immediate propositions is not ultimately compelling. It falls below the standard of truth we should want to use, just because it is predicated on the agent's being ignorant of the proposition's full constitution (i.e., its being constituted by a false determining whole).

At the close of this examination, then, we have counted out primitive correspondence as an eligible avenue for the positive expression of the true. The true cannot be expressed positively through simple propositions or primitive correspondence – however, those false propositions can be seen and treated as true (although ultimately false), so long as the mediating context which determines them as false is ignored. This form of truth is not, however, incompatible with Adorno's theory of the truth as wholly negative, as has been shown. These immediate propositions, and the lower form of truth associated with them, inherently point toward the highest level of the truth (as negative), thus ultimately necessitating that any serious attempt to cognize them will lead to the negative theory of truth which has been outlined.

### **3.10 Negativity Consolidated**

This concludes our examination of the three plausible ways in which Adorno's theory of the true as negative could be defeated. Each of them has been nullified. We cannot plausibly interpret Adorno's theory of mediation and determination, and the resultant negativity of the true, as in any way hyperbolic, as shown in section 3.5. As a result of

the categories of reification, self-preservation and thin determination, it is not possible to create new concepts which are able to positively express the true, as shown in section 3.6. And finally, we are not able to express the true positively through basic statements about objects ('primitive correspondence'), as has just been shown in section 3.9. Given this comprehensive prevention of any positive attempt to express or grasp the true, Adorno is forced to transfer his theory of truth from positivity to negativity.

At the outset, we asserted that, as is universally recognized, Adorno operates with a negative theory of truth. By systematically demonstrating the theoretical *grounds* for this negativity, we can now confidently posit Adorno's theory of the truth as negative as following necessarily from these theoretical grounds. Moreover, we have been able to trace the intricate relationship between this negativity and the types of truth we can attribute to immediate propositions.

We have now finished setting out, examining and supporting the first element of Adorno's textural theory of truth, the second being the performativity of truth. However, before we move to consider the performative element of Adorno's theory of truth, we first need to consider an apparent contradiction in Adorno's work.

### **3.11 Negativity and Rich Analysis**

Up to this point, we have been preoccupied with establishing that Adorno's theory of the truth as negative is not an unsupported position, but in fact follows directly from his theoretical commitments. We established this by showing how Adorno's views on the nature of the concept, agent and society forcibly falsified all positive forms of the expression of truth. As presented, this was a coherent account.

As we have established that this negativity characterizes the truth, we must identify negativity with the non-identical, which Adorno takes to be the true. As this non-identical is negative, we can at this point say that the true cannot be expressible in either primitive correspondence (cf. section 3.9) or proposed modifications in the concepts which govern experience (cf. section 3.6). To anticipate a detailed account to be given in sections 3.12 – 3.20, the truth that is expressed negatively through the non-identical will be nothing over and above the display of the insufficiency of the concepts which mediate one's experience. This 'display' will be differentiated from the proposed modification of concepts discounted in section 3.6 by virtue of its not immediately expressing the insufficiency of concepts, in a statement, but rather by virtue of engaging these concepts and forcing them to break down.

A problem for this picture of the non-identical as being constituted as purely negative is that Adorno's interpretive practice, the expression which he gives to the

non-identical, would appear to violate the rules against expressing the truth positively which we have just expounded. Instead of neatly drawing limits to what can be expressible of the true, Adorno often seems to make sets of very complex, positive assertions in service of his negative theory of the true. As most of Adorno's analyses are complex, and sustained across a good number of pages, it is difficult to find neat examples of this. *Minima Moralia* often serves as a fair demonstration of this phenomenon; Adorno frequently gives an account of various phenomena which is largely constituted by positive assertions. For example, Adorno gives an analysis of the individualism which pervades modern working life. While it terminates in a familiar presentation of a contradiction ('Their belated individualism poisons what little is left of the individual.' (MM: 24)), it is largely constituted by positively stated observations (presumably intended to be taken as true) -

As the professions of the middle-man lose their economic basis, the private lives of countless people are becoming those of agents and go-betweens; indeed the entire private domain is being engulfed by a mysterious activity that bears all the features of commercial life without there being actually any business to transact. All these nervous people [...] believe that only by.. tradesman's qualities, can they ingratiate themselves [...] and soon there is no relationship that is not seen as a 'connection', no impulse not first censored as to whether it deviates from the acceptable. (MM: 23)

The upshot of this example is that the content and truth of Adorno's analysis does not seem to be entirely contained in the display of a contradiction inherent in individualism. Adorno seems to also be making certain positive analyses, statements of fact, which are intended to be seen as true. In these elements of his analysis, Adorno appears to content himself with laying out what was termed the 'revelatory determination' of the object. He expresses, through disagreement about the constitution of the object and flagging up problems in the applications of concepts, ways in which the apparent immediacy of the object is in fact constituted by its mediation. (The way in which current forms of private life are in fact reflective of and determined by developments in the social structure). The problem presented by this is twofold – first, it would seem to be a positive, rich account which is not merely negative and secondly it would seem to split Adorno's theory of the true into a 'two-tier' account. I should like to lay out these two problems in turn. Once this is done, these two problems can be solved simultaneously.

I will first deal with the ostensible problem of Adorno's positivity. The most



obvious response is that I am simply mistaken – Adorno is recognizably engaged in a negative project, the demolition of an account of the object which relies merely on immediacy. However, this response falls into the trap, outlined above in section 3.4, of conflating two forms of negativity. There is little question that Adorno's analyses, as shown above, are negative in the 'political' sense – they all busy themselves with the *rejection* of a given account, a putative set of beliefs in an antagonist, etc. This *political* negativity is irrelevant. Our examination of Adorno's theory of the true as necessarily *negative*, showed this negativity as a Hegelian negativity, which is to say that it is unable to put forward any assertion beyond the display of the falsity of the pre-given. This was bolstered by our discovery that this negativity also excluded primitive correspondence-type statements as true. Adorno's analyses, as found above, would not be in difficulty, then, if they confined themselves merely to analyses of methodological and theoretical antinomies, contradictions and presuppositions. Such analyses would be wholly negative, in the relevant sense we have outlined.

However, the problem we find in Adorno's analysis excerpted above is that the political rejection of the pre-given exceeds a Hegelian version of negativity. Adorno does not merely tell us what we cannot say about an object, but in fact unfolds a positive set of assertions concerning the object's true imbrication with other social facts and processes. In this sense, Adorno can appear to be merely replacing one empirical account of objects with another, the only difference being that Adorno's empiricism allows for and includes a complicated social ontology. Essentially, then, it can seem as if Adorno is replacing one positive account of the object for another, more complex account of the object which is equally happy to make positive assertions. Were this to in fact be the case, Adorno's theory of truth would no longer seem to be truly negative, contradicting both Adorno's own statements (e.g. ND: 158 / 161) and the account that we have just given of the necessity of Adorno's holding the truth to be negative. There seems to be a serious inconsistency between Adorno's philosophy and its application. Please note, and this is a point which will shortly become absolutely vital, this difficulty only stands as long as we take Adorno to be thinking that the true can be discursively expressed.

The second, more serious, difficulty which I identified is that Adorno seems to be introducing a two-tier account of truth. This difficulty can be shown quite quickly, simply by citing some assertions that Adorno makes concerning the non-identical -

[T]he function of riddle-solving [i.e., dialectical philosophy] is to light up the riddle-*Gestalt* like lightning and to negate it (*aufzuheben*), not to persist behind the riddle and imitate it. Authentic philosophic interpretation does not

meet up with a fixed meaning which already lies behind the question, but lights up suddenly and momentarily, and consumes it at the same time. (Adorno 1977: 31 -32).

Here, we see that Adorno is positing the end goal of philosophy to be a momentary ('suddenly and momentarily') revelation of the true which also serves, he says, to cause the question to 'disappear' (Adorno 1977: 32). This is a clear re-iteration of the line of thought we identify (and examine below) in *Negative Dialectics*, written over 30 years later, in which Adorno again claims that philosophical comprehension of the true was a momentary, non-discursive experience.<sup>49</sup> We can see above that Adorno has identified cognizance of the non-identical as taking place in a flash of comprehension. Moreover, this flash of comprehension would appear to be identified with some epistemological event which is not in conformity with conventional modes of cognition which proceed according to the concept. This appears to contradict Adorno's positive exposition of the truth in the analysis of individualism excerpted further above. In that excerpt, it would appear that the truth was being identified not with an extra-conceptual 'flash' of cognition, but rather with a culturally rich and extended display of an object's true mediation. This splitting of the truth into two tiers is undesirable firstly because Adorno does not present himself as having a theory of truth which is multifarious. Rather, his assertions concerning the non-identical appear to be unified. Moreover, should we impute an implicit two-tier theory of truth to Adorno, we would instantly put ourselves into the position of needing to go over his assertions concerning the true and parse them out as applying to either the non-identical as a negative flash of cognition, or as positive and rich explanation of mediation. This would be undesirable just because we would have little exegetical material to help us in this task, and so it would introduce a significant degree of uncertainty into our dealings with his work. As with the previous objection, it is important to note here that this difficulty is dependent on our understanding Adorno as taking the analyses given above as in some way identical with or equal to the non-identical, or true, which they are intended to express. Once more, then, the equation of the truth's *expression* with the true *itself* is causing this

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<sup>49</sup> '[I]n philosophy the authentic question will somehow almost always include its answer. Unlike science, philosophy knows no fixed sequence of question and answer [...] This distinguishes the relation of understanding and judgment from the usual order of time [...] What is transmitted here is the fiber of the so-called philosophical demonstration, a mode of proof that contrasts with the mathematical model. And yet that model does not simply disappear, for the stringency of a philosophical thought requires its mode of proceeding to be measured by the forms of inference. Philosophical proof is the effort to give statements a binding quality by making them commensurable with the means of discursive thinking. But it does not purely follow from that thinking: the critical reflection of such cogitative productivity is itself a philosophical content.' (ND: 63 – 64 / 71 - 72)

difficulty.

So, as long as we identify the discursive expression of truth in analyses of mediation, etc., written by Adorno with the true itself, we have two main problems. First, there seems to be a contradiction between the negativity which Adorno allots to the true, and the positivity which we find in the analyses of the true. Secondly, this introduces a two-tier theory of truth, with truth being constituted by a discursive, positive analysis of revelatory determination on the one hand, and a wholly negative display of the non-identical which is not discursive but in fact takes place in a 'flash' of comprehension, on the other. These two difficulties can be dismissed simultaneously, if we find a way of relating the expression of the true (in its positive, discursive form) to the true itself (a flash of non-discursive cognition) in such a way that the former is not identified with the latter. Remarkably, this difficulty is completely solved by Adorno in a rather compressed extract from *Negative Dialectics* -

[I]n philosophy the authentic question will somehow almost always include its answer. Unlike science, philosophy knows no fixed sequence of question and answer [...] This distinguishes the relation of understanding and judgment from the usual order of time [...] What is transmitted here is the fiber of the so-called philosophical demonstration, a mode of proof that contrasts with the mathematical model. And yet that model does not simply disappear, for the stringency of a philosophical thought requires its mode of proceeding to be measured by the forms of inference. Philosophical proof is the effort to give statements a binding quality by making them commensurable with the means of discursive thinking. But it does not purely follow from that thinking: the critical reflection of such cogitative productivity is itself a philosophical content. (ND: 63 – 64, 71- 72)

This extract contains the solution to these difficulties in germ. We must dedicate some time to expounding it especially because, as a further benefit, it will solidify the relationship between Adorno's theory of the true and his own method of instantiating the true in his works.

Adorno begins by asserting that philosophical comprehension is distinguished from the 'usual order of time' . This distinguishing is accomplished by philosophical comprehension knowing 'no fixed sequence of question and answer [...] Its answers are given, not made, not generated: they are the recoil of the unfolded, transparent question' (ND: 63 / 71). Philosophical comprehension, then, does not constitute a line of reasoning which is produced in response to a question, and thereby generates an

answer. Rather, 'in philosophy the authentic question will somehow almost always include its answer' (ND: 63 / 71). What Adorno is here clearly asserting is that the philosophical access of truth is not the product of a discursive, inferential or deductive line of reasoning. Rather, the question and answer are simultaneously disclosed. This seems to correspond to the 'flash' of comprehension identified earlier. The philosophical true for Adorno, then, is experienced directly, rather than being revealed through discursive lines of argumentation. Again, Adorno gives this thought direct expression –

Paradoxically, the more a philosophical thought yields to its experience, the closer its approach to an analytical judgment. (ND: 64 / 72)

The true, then, is constituted by the experience of a philosophical thought which, in being experienced, becomes akin to an analytic judgment. The experience of the truth, then, is not legitimated as true by valid lines of argumentation, but is in fact legitimated as true by virtue of being experienced. So, this experience in itself is the affirmation and the presentation of the true. The philosophical experience, fully experienced, serves as the answer to the question posed by that experience.

Further sense will be given to the precise way in which we can comprehend the unification of the true and a specific experience in a 'flash' of comprehension below, in sections 3.12 – 3.20. However, what is significant here is that Adorno provides an account of the relationship which obtains between this self-certifying flash of experience and Adorno's other treatment of truth, in which he appears to lay out discursively true assertions.

Adorno does contrast the flash of truth in the 'analytic' experience from the 'mathematical model' (ND: 64 / 72). By 'mathematical model', Adorno is referring to the discursive presentation of truth in which a problem is posited separately from its answer, and then an answer is sought (ND: 63 / 71), using forms of inference, etc. (ND: 64 / 72). At this point in Adorno's explanation, then, the problem of relating the flash model of truth to the discursively rich model remains. Adorno is drawing a contrast between the flash of comprehension we find in his theory of truth (the 'analytical judgment'), and the discursive account of truth given in inductive / deductive chains of reasons which we often find in Adorno's own practice (the 'mathematical model'). However, having drawn this contrast, Adorno provides a solution. After contrasting the philosophical mode of immediate comprehension of truth to the 'mathematical model', Adorno asserts -

And yet that [mathematical] model does not simply disappear, for the stringency of a philosophical thought requires its mode of proceeding to be measured by the forms of inference. Philosophical proof is the effort to give statements a binding quality by making them commensurable with the means of discursive thinking. (ND: 64 / 72)

At this point, then, Adorno is relating the initial, non-discursive experience of truth to its discursive manifestation. While philosophical experience excludes discursive modes of thought, such as inference, etc., nonetheless 'the stringency of philosophical thought *requires* its mode of proceeding to be measured by the forms of inference' (ND: 64 / 72, emphasis mine). Adorno is positing here that although the initial presentation of truth is effected by a philosophical judgment or cognition which is not discursively expressible, this truth in itself requires, just by its own stringency, the expression in discursive terms. Moreover, this discursive expression is posited by Adorno as a 'philosophical proof' which seeks to make this initial, non-discursive truth 'commensurable with the means of discursive thinking'.

It seems here that Adorno is solving the relation between the negative, non-discursive form of truth and positive, discursive form of truth by saying that the latter is simply an expression of the former. The former, then, seems to be posited as primary, with the latter, discursive expression coming afterwards, serving as a recapitulation in communicable, discursive terms of what the agent originally perceives immediately and non-discursively.

This would certainly seem to solve the issue of relating the two forms of truth, if the discursively conceptual and positive was simply an *instantiation* of (and hence equivalent to) the non-discursively non-conceptual and negative. However, this understanding of their relation cannot obtain. As we have already seen above in section 3.11, an attempt to draw an equivalence between these two types of truth is incoherent – if the discursive is truly compatible with the non-discursive, if the non-discursive's content is ultimately reducible to the discursive, then once again there seems to be a contradiction between Adorno's theory of the truth as negative (and the strong theoretic reasons there are for why Adorno should want to keep the truth as negative, as explored in sections 3.4 – 3.10) and the positive nature of his discursive analyses. The two appear to be incompatible. As such, then, if this *was* Adorno's theory of the relationship between the two types of truth, we should reject it.

Thankfully this is not, in fact, the entirety of Adorno's theory. He denies that the two forms of truth are straightforwardly equivalent, and in fact posits a complex relationship obtaining between the two. He goes on to say -

Philosophical proof is the effort to give statements a binding quality by making them commensurable with the means of discursive thinking. But it does not purely follow from that thinking: the critical reflection of such cogitative productivity is itself a philosophical content. (ND: 64 / 72)

We have here the direct statement that this 'discursive thinking' – which is, if you like, the post festum translation of the 'flash' of comprehension into chains of inferences and assertions – is in itself insufficient. This is a flat denial that the two forms of truth are, in themselves, equivalent. The discursive outlay of what the flash of truth has revealed is insufficient. To it must be added, Adorno claims, 'the critical reflection of such cogitative productivity' which is in itself a 'philosophical content'.

This is of course far from clear; however, this assertion is absolutely fundamental to comprehending the solution to the two problems laid out above, and so we must apply careful exegesis to this sentence and lay out precisely what Adorno is saying. The first, and most important, thing we must note is that this discursive outlay of the truth stands in need of an extra 'philosophical content' to make it truly adequate to the 'flash' form of truth. The discursive and flash forms of truth, then, are not necessarily estranged, or *incapable* of being put into a relation of equivalence or adequacy – rather, the discursive outlay of the truth is, on its own, missing a single philosophical content which will render it an adequate translation of the flash form of truth.

Adorno identifies this necessary extra philosophical content with 'that thinking [...] the critical reflection of such cogitative productivity'. As is apparent from the original German, here Adorno is referring to that 'thinking' not in the static, depersonalized sense in which we might refer to the laws of geometry as a body of thought (i.e., not as a series of propositions which are not being entertained by any specific speaker), but rather to that 'cogitative productivity' as an ongoing activity; as the cogitative engagement of a given, actual agent which is being undergone at a specific time.<sup>50</sup> This is reinforced by Adorno's identification of this with 'critical reflection' which, again, is apparently a reference to a performed epistemological activity.

We have the claim from Adorno, then, that discursive thinking cannot be

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<sup>50</sup> 'Es folgt aber nicht rein aus diesem: die kritische Reflexion solcher Produktivität des Denkens ist selbst ein Inhalt der Philosophie.' (Adorno 1997b : 72) The 'Produktivität des Denkens' – translated by Ashton as 'cogitative productivity', literally 'productivity of thought' – refers to the thought of agents, rather than impersonal bodies of thought, due to the term 'Denkens''s reference to thought in the process of being executed. The far more natural term for impersonal thought would be 'Gedanke'.

adequate insofar as it is merely a set of theoretical assertions. Put differently, this discursive attempt to instantiate the true is insufficient insofar as it simply gives rise to discursive assertions. This is, of course, thoroughly unusual. Adorno is asserting that these chains of inference, deduction, etc., do not in themselves attain the condition of truth. This inadequacy has to be alleviated by the engagement of the agent's 'critical reflection' which is accomplished while engaged in 'discursive thinking'. Already hinted at here is that this discursive translation of the true, cannot be true simply 'on the page', as it were – it cannot be true simply by virtue of its propositional qualities. Rather, it must be *thought*, take place as an activity.

Adorno is asserting, then, that the discursively true cannot be adequate to the 'flash' form of truth unless it is performed by the agent. We have seen that the discursively true does not attain the truth when it is, say, written on the page. Rather, it is the agent's active involvement with this discursive outlay of the true which adds a further 'philosophical content' and causes this discursive thinking to become sufficient, and sufficiently true.

The relationship between the direct 'flash' conduit to the true as non-identical, and the discursive, richer attempt to instantiate the non-identical would appear to be one of estrangement. The latter cannot, in itself, be sufficient to the former. They are brought into a relationship of equivalence by the agent's engaged *activity* of critical reflection. It is important to note, here, that this activity is not limited to merely registering what is written on the page. Rather, Adorno asserts that this engagement of the agent's is a 'philosophical content' – it is equipollent with the discursively written itself, and plays an equal determining role in the truth or falsity of that discursively written material. What must be noted, then, is that this activity of the agent cannot be plausibly termed or understood as a simple act of *recognizing, affirming or bringing to notice* something already present. Rather, the agent's extension of his regard and engagement of his 'critical reflection' *while thinking* is itself a philosophical element, which has a role over and above mere recognition of what is already true.

This idea, that the agent's cognitive engagement is an element in the truth-conditionality of the assertions with which the agent is engaged, is highly unusual. I will term this position of Adorno's 'performativity'. This performativity suffices to close off the problems identified at the head of this section – the truth of the non-identical is no longer identified with its textual expression. Rather, that expression is necessary but not sufficient – it is the material for the agent's *performance*, which itself will constitute something which is adequate to the negative, non-conceptual true. Adorno is not, then, drawing an equivalence between the true as negative, and his instantiation of the true as positive, discursive analyses. Rather, he holds that it is the combination of these

discursive analyses with the agents own performance which will result in an instantiation of the negatively true. This is of course a highly odd position for Adorno to take, and as yet I have not given very much detail to precisely what Adorno means by this 'performance' of the agent. However, we have now, in the course of our investigation, come onto the second element of Adorno's textural theory of truth, namely its performativity. I will explore and explain this performativity at length in the following section.

### **3.12 Performativity**

Adorno's theory of the truth as 'performative' is highly complex. At the outset it would be helpful to provide a brief gloss of what is intended, in this context, by 'performativity'. I stipulate a theory of truth which is 'performative' to hold that the true cannot be simply expressed or instantiated discursively. Which is to say, that the true cannot be cashed out merely as a set of assertions and arguments. Rather these assertions and arguments are used, by the agent, as the grounds for a performance, this performance being a spontaneous, cognitive activity. For a performative theory of truth, the true is nothing over and above this performance. This gloss will be filled in with more detail as we go on. Adorno's theory of truth is performative in a two-fold sense. In the first, weak, sense, Adorno's theory of the true is performative as it posits the necessity of the engagement of the agent. The second, stronger, sense of this performativity lies in asserting that the true is nothing over and above this engagement of the agent. I should like to deal with these two components in order.

The first, weak, performative element to Adorno's theory of the true was laid out at the close of the previous section. We found that Adorno asserted that the truth was not limited to the concrete instantiations of that truth (in written assertions, etc.) but in fact also required the active attendance of the agent to cognize that truth (ND: 64 / 72). This may seem so trivial as be trite – after all, on any theory of truth the *perception* of truth requires the engagement of the perceiver's regard. On this reading, then, the 'critical reflection' which is necessary is simply the requirement that there be a competent reader to see that the truth is so instantiated. Interpreted in this way, the weak performativity which Adorno allots to his theory of truth is weak indeed, amounting simply to the assertion that the perception of truth requires a competent agent. However, this reading is incorrect. Adorno is not simply drawing our attention to the fact that a competent perceiver is required. This is intimated by Adorno's terming the engagement of the reader a further 'philosophical content'. By asserting that the 'critical reflection' is 'itself a philosophical content', Adorno has asserted that the agent must not merely epistemologically reflect what is already present in the set of



assertions before him, but in fact add the *further* content of his own performative engagement.

The difference, while apparently slight, is in fact considerable. It would seem that the attendance of the agent is not merely a condition on the accurate *registering* of a pre-existent philosophical content (as on a conventional reading) but is in fact an integral component of the resultant truth itself. The weak version of performativity, then, is in fact the assertion that the agent's spontaneous engagement with the propositional lay-out is *itself* a further component of the truth of that propositional lay-out, beyond the explicitly stated content of the propositions themselves.

This is an assuredly odd idea. The agent has to, as it were, perform the truth internally, this performance itself being not a form of access to the truth contained in the material (the text) but in fact an element of that truth itself. This first, weak, form of the performativity of Adorno's theory of truth allowed us to escape the problem outlined in the previous section, as it prevents the textual expression of the true being exhaustive of the true itself. Rather, this textual expression of the true has to be conjoined with the further philosophical content provided by the agent's spontaneous engagement. However, now I have set out this first level of the performativity of Adorno's theory of truth, I should now like to move to consider the richer account which we can derive from Adorno's work. This richer account will provide an explanation of what the true actually is for Adorno, as well as give content to the assertion that the agent's engagement somehow serves as a philosophical content and truth-maker.

### **3.13 Full Performativity**

In the previous section, then, we saw that Adorno incorporated an element of performativity into his theory of truth, in that he asserted that the textual instantiation of the true is not sufficient, in itself, but in fact must be accompanied by the agent's own internalization and 'critical reflection' of that text. As we saw, this engagement of the agent went beyond the mere registering of what was already present in the text, but in fact was a constituent of the truth-value of the text itself. This in itself was sufficiently unusual to warrant comment, and we spent some time examining and making sense of this 'weak performativity' which was present in Adorno's work. However, it is my belief that this performativity which we identified in Adorno's work in fact warrants further examination, and in fact constitutes Adorno's theory of truth. This performativity, of the agent's performing the content present in the text, should in fact stand as an exhaustive account of Adorno's theory of truth.

In order to begin making clear how this weak performativity can ramify into a full account of the true as performative, I first need to make clear what cause we have to

think that Adorno's theory of the true should be identified with a performance which is undertaken by the agent. In fact, there is a good deal of exegetical support for reading Adorno's theory of truth in this way. This exegetical support derives from two lines of thought in Adorno's work. First, we have expounded at length in the previous Chapters the universal delusive influence of the epistemological whole. At the opening of this Chapter, we discovered that this strong delusive influence of the epistemological whole was such that Adorno was obliged to posit the truth as negative (sections 3.4 – 3.10). However, Adorno does not rest simply with the assertion that the truth must be wholly negative, and consist merely of the critique of the pre-given. Adorno advocates creating a *break* in the false epistemological whole. Vitally, Adorno asserts that the break must not be produced by attempting to move outside of that whole, but in fact by *engaging with* that false epistemological whole. Adorno is asserting, then, that the inherently false set of concepts, theoretical positions, beliefs, *etc.*, should not be jettisoned or discarded, but fully engaged and employed, and thereby induced to 'break' and display the true. This is an odd idea, which he expounds in a variety of places in *Negative Dialectics* -

Yet the appearance of identity is inherent in thought itself, in its pure form. To think is to identify. Conceptual order is content to screen what thinking seeks to comprehend [...] Aware that the conceptual totality is mere appearance, *I have no way but to break immanently, in its own measure, through the appearance of total identity.* (ND: 5 / 17, emphasis mine)

Here Adorno asserts that 'identity' (serving here as shorthand for the false identification of a concept with its object) is not a contingent element of thought, but is in fact constitutive of thought. This is in complete accord with the inherent delusiveness which our investigation of the concept and its mediating influences discovered. Adorno asserts that this epistemological error of thought is not simply *erasable*, but must be *engaged* – broken 'immanently, in its own measure'. The 'appearance of total identity' must be employed and used in order to break this appearance – in order to display that total identity does not in fact obtain. The same 'conceptual order' which 'screens' thought, closing off access to the truth, must be used in order to undo this 'screening' effect. Adorno is asserting, then, that the conceptual form of thought which inherently takes itself to exhaust its object must be used in order to display that it in fact does not.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Adorno often uses an odd locution whereby concepts and other impersonal philosophical

*Objectively, dialectics means to break the compulsion to achieve identity, and to break it by means of the energy stored up in that compulsion and congealed in its objectifications [...] As a sense of nonidentity through identity, dialectics is not only an advancing process but a retrograde one at the same time. (ND: 157 / 159 -160, emphasis mine)*

This serves as a reinforcement of the thought expressed in the previous extract. Rather than attempting to voluntarily transfer our thought away from 'identity', we must employ the innate, delusive 'compulsion to achieve identity' (i.e. compulsion to have the concept exhaust the object) and thereby use 'the energy stored up in that compulsion' in order to display the impossibility of the object of that compulsion. Once more, then, we see that Adorno intends to use an inherently false tool in order to achieve a display of the truth.

*'Dialectics is the self-consciousness of the objective context of delusion; it does not mean to have escaped from that context. Its objective goal is to break out of the context from within. The strength required from the break grows in dialectics from the context of immanence; what would apply to it once more is Hegel's dictum that in dialectics an opponent's strength is absorbed and turned against him, not just in the dialectical particular, but eventually in the whole. By means of logic, dialectics grasps the coercive character of logic [...]' (ND: 406 / 398, emphasis mine)*

In this final extract we have this same line of thought reiterated and made explicit – the role of dialectics is not to '[escape its] context' but to 'break out of that context from within'. It is important to note that Adorno is in fact making two equally vital strands of thought explicit here. First, dialectics must not arbitrarily escape from its epistemological context. As such, it cannot merely posit an extra-conceptual epistemological set-up, or attempt to voluntarily do away with the problems of epistemology by setting up new concepts, forms of thought, etc. This accords well with the analysis given in section 3.6. Vitally, having shown that dialectics cannot escape a

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phenomena are personified (e.g., 'What the philosophical concept will not abandon is the yearning that animates the nonconceptual side of art' (ND: 15 / 27)). I have often taken up this locution in this thesis. For example, I repeatedly talk of concepts 'taking themselves' to exhaust the object. This should be understood as shorthand for the assertion that 'the concept, as employed and understood by the agent, is seen by the agent as exhausting the object'. Other assertions using this locution should be interpreted in the same way.

delusive epistemological context through mere will, he then adds that its 'objective goal is to break out of the context from within'. While dialectics cannot voluntarily escape its delusive epistemological context, then, it does not thereby have to content itself with merely tracing the imperfections in that context. Adorno still feels that dialectics can not only criticize pre-given bodies of thought, but in fact 'break out' of them. This shows that Adorno rejects mere scepticism, as our analysis shows below in section 3.18. This is also made explicit here -

What the philosophical concept will not abandon is the yearning that animates the nonconceptual side of art, and whose fulfillment shuns the immediate side of art as mere appearance. The concept – the organon of thinking, and yet the wall between thinking and the thought – negates that yearning. *Philosophy can neither circumvent such negation nor submit to it.* (ND: 15 / 27, emphasis mine)

Adorno, then, while noting that the concept is necessary for thought ('the organon of thinking') and also that it is inherently problematic ('the wall between thinking and the thought') – for the reasons that we have noted at length in our analysis of thin determination, reification, etc. – is not content to 'submit to' the concept's prevention of the satisfaction of the urge to comprehend that which escapes the concept. He will not, then, submit to merely critical, sceptical analyses of philosophical positions, but desires a further epistemological practice which can provide a break with this falsifying influence, as the above extracts have shown. As such, he has in mind a further form of dialectical behaviour, different to mere immanent critique or scepticism. I claim that this further form of dialectical behaviour can only be the performance.

While I believe I have established that Adorno requires and posits a dialectical activity which exceeds mere immanent critique and scepticism, and have suggested that performativity satisfies this condition, I have perhaps yet to provide demonstrate sufficient exegetical support for the idea of performativity. While I will go on to delineate exactly what the performance consists in below, I first want to make clear that this idea of performativity is supported in Adorno's work. Drawing again on *Negative Dialectics*, we have the following example -

On its subjective side, dialectics amounts to thinking so that the thought form will no longer turn its objects into immutable ones, into objects that remain the same. Experience shows that they do not remain the same. The unstable character of traditional philosophy's solid identity can be learned

from its guarantor, the individual human consciousness [...] [When dialectically treating problems of identity,] technical terminology stands ready with the customary formula [...] [But, a] purely formal [dialectical] reversal would leave room for the subreption that dialectics is *prima philosophia* after all, as "*prima dialectica*". The test of the turn to nonidentity is its performance; if it remained declarative, it would be revoking itself. (ND: 154-155 / 157)

In the extract just cited, Adorno opposes the agent's experience of the failure of identity, with a formalized dialectics which treats its subject matter according to preset formulae. In Adorno's opposition of the performance to the merely declarative, there is the opposition of that which calls itself dialectics by virtue of formalized standards (as in the straw-man Hegel who allegedly philosophized always in triads of thesis-antithesis-synthesis) to that dialectics which performatively instantiates a turn to non-identity. This can be clarified by looking at Adorno's assertion, earlier in the extract, that the 'human consciousness' is the 'guarantor' of the failure of philosophical identity. Adorno strikingly locates the justification of a critique of conventional identity thinking not in formal argument, but rather in *experience*. This seems to associate the alternative to merely declarative, formal, types of proof with the consciousness. The performance would seem to be posited as having a role in inducing this experiential 'guarantor' of the falsity of experience. Adorno is claiming that dialectics cannot conduct itself by means of preset formulae (as it would then become '*prima philosophia*', or 'first philosophy'), but instead must performatively engage with its subject matter, this performance entailing some guarantor in the experience of the agent, which demonstrates the success of this 'turn to nonidentity'.

Here we have a clear separation being drawn by Adorno between the 'declarative' and 'performance', both of which are entailed by his philosophy's 'turn to nonidentity'. This duality, between declaration and performance, has been anticipated by our analysis in section 3.11. Therein, we discovered a differentiation between Adorno's rich, rhetorical texts and the 'critical reflection of cogitative productivity' (ND: 64 / 72). We discovered that the discursive lay-out of Adorno's analyses (the 'declarative') was posited by Adorno as insufficient – rather, it had to be accompanied by the agent's own conceptual performance of that written material (the 'performance'). Linking up with the analysis in section 3.11, then, we can see that this is a clear and explicit support of the idea that the true requires a performance.

What must be said methodologically, in the form of general reflection, in

order not to be defenseless against the philosopher's philosophy, can be legitimized solely in its performance [*Durchführung*], thus denying the method in turn [...] The philosophical ideal would be to obviate accounting for the deed by doing it. (ND: 48 / 58, translation modified)

We see here a repetition of Adorno's central thought that the genuine philosophical thought cannot be legitimated merely by the 'mathematical model' of the assessment of inductive and deductive validity, etc. Rather, it must be legitimated in the course of its 'performance'. Once again, then, there is introduced a distinction between conventional modes of justification, as associated with the 'discursive' or 'declarative' modes of philosophy, and a different, active form of justification – here associated with 'performance'. Our analysis in the previous section has already demonstrated that the agent's own 'critical reflection' is an integral component in this performance.

With this exegetical support, then, we have begun to make plausible the thought that the dialectical procedure which serves to instantiate the true is nothing over and above a performance of the agent, which takes place in a dialectical relationship obtaining between the text and the agent himself. This 'performance' would in itself institute the 'break' which Adorno outlined as a desideratum above, and thereby finally provide a method of escaping Adorno's holistic theory of falsity, and provide a method of instantiating the true.

If we *are* to posit this performance as constituting the solution to the negativity of the true entailed by Adorno's theoretic commitments, three questions arise. These are 1) How does this performance effect the 'break' which Adorno identified as the desideratum of a dialectical instantiation of the true? 2) How is this performative creation of a 'break' true? 3) If this account of the true as a performative break effected by the agent in a dialectical relationship with the text is coherent, what is there to be said for it? In other words, why should we *want* to interpret Adorno's theory of the true in this way? I will answer these three questions in turn. These questions having been answered, Adorno's theory of truth will have been established as performative.

### **3.14 Problem 1) How does this performance effect the 'break' which Adorno identified as the desideratum of a dialectical instantiation of the true?**

To begin seeing how the agent's performative interrogation of the philosophical text amounts to the creation of the immanent break which Adorno identified as the goal of dialectical practice, we first need to briefly go over the specific features of the manner in which Adorno wrote his philosophy.

Adorno's rhetorical method is intricate and unusual. As per his own assertions

concerning philosophy's rejection of the 'mathematical model' extracted above, Adorno refuses to provide simple lines of inferences and deductions in his work, instead analyzing the topic from any number of perspectives and disciplines. It is the apparent insouciance with which Adorno induces a purely meta-theoretical consideration of a given topic to render up reference to, for example, its socio-historical grounds which often produces the most memorable passages in Adorno's work. It is very difficult to give a concise example of this feature of Adorno's philosophy. However, a miniature of this tendency can be found in Adorno's analysis of Kant's theory of freedom -

While Kant, in practical philosophy, rigorously proclaims the *chorismos* [separation] of what is and what ought to be, his is nonetheless compelled to resort to mediations. His idea of freedom turns into a paradox: it comes to be incorporated in the causality of the phenomenal world that is incompatible with the Kantian concept of freedom [...] But the paradoxical character of Kant's doctrine strictly corresponds to its location in reality. Social stress on freedom as existent coalesces with undiminished repression, and psychologically, with coercive traits. [...] Like the idealists after him, Kant cannot bear freedom without compulsion. Its mere undistorted conception fills him with that fear of anarchy which later urged the bourgeois world to liquidate its own freedom [...] What became Kant's fearfully majestic a priori is what psychoanalysts trace back to psychological conditions. (ND: 231 – 232 / 231)

Adorno here analyzes internal contradictions in Kant's account of freedom (I have omitted much of this in the extract). However, these purely philosophical problems which Adorno identifies (the subordination of freedom to necessity in Kant's account) are swiftly related to extra-philosophical conditions; the paradoxical nature of Kant's theory of freedom is related to a contradiction internal to the nature of freedom in society. Kant's theory of freedom is engaged in a purely philosophical manner, and analyzed until it yields a contradiction. This contradiction is between Kant's conception of freedom, and what Adorno sees as Kant's disruption of this conception arising from his employment of necessity. Should we take Adorno's analysis to be compelling, he has forced Kant's work on freedom into a position of internal contradiction and hence unworkability. We might then expect this to be the end of Adorno's analysis of Kant. However, while this philosophical (as it were) engagement with Kant seems to have concluded, the analysis continues from a fresh perspective. Adorno now interrogates this philosophical problem of Kant's from a socio-historical perspective. Moreover, this

fresh perspective does not supplant the first, but rather contributes to a mutual project of explanation. The most distinctive element of the above analysis is its convulsive switch of perspective in the consideration of the given topic. It begins analysis from a tacit philosophical perspective and, in the course of this analysis, is forced to give up this perspective in favour of another. This perspectival restlessness appears to have two main features. First, each perspective employed in the course of the analysis nonetheless has in common its exclusive focus on the given topic under consideration. Secondly, this exchange of perspective is not presented as arbitrary, but as resulting from an insoluble contradiction encountered in the employment of the previous perspective. Adorno explicitly thematizes this multi-perspectival analysis in his paper, 'The Essay as Form' -

The *how* of expression should rescue, in precision, what the refusal to outline sacrifices, without, however, betraying the intended matter to the arbitrariness of previously decreed significations [...] In the essay, concepts do not build a continuum of operations, thought does not advance in a single direction, rather the aspects of the argument interweave as in a carpet. The fruitfulness of the thoughts depends on the density of this texture. (Adorno 1984: 101)

The essay, however, has to do with that which is blind in its objects. Conceptually it wants to blow open what cannot be absorbed by concepts, or what, through contradictions in which concepts entangle themselves, betrays the fact that the network of their objectivity is a purely subjective rigging [...] it constructs the interwovenness of concepts in such a way that they can be imagined as themselves interwoven in the object. (Adorno 1984: 110)

In these remarkably explicit methodological remarks, Adorno baldly asserts that the condition of correct comprehension (the 'fruitfulness of [thought]' (Adorno 1984: 101)) is dependent upon 'the interwovenness of concepts' (Adorno 1984: 110), this interwovenness being a direct product of the insufficiency of the concepts being employed (Adorno 1984: 110). From the example adduced above, together with Adorno's own explicit methodological remarks, we have pieced together the following picture of the way in which Adorno writes his philosophical texts. Adorno considers a given topic, and attempts to analyze it from within a given theoretical practice (whether that be philosophical, sociological, or whatever). This practice is employed until it reaches such a point that it visibly contradicts itself (Adorno 2000: 110), or Adorno is



able to present some given fact which either undermines the practice being employed (Adorno 2000: 110), or is merely a datum which that practice cannot include, and thereby undermines that practice's self-understanding as providing an exhaustive analysis of the topic at hand. Adorno does not merely present the inadequacies in each epistemological practice, but instead visibly employs that practice and leads it into displaying its own insufficiency. This insufficiency then summons a further concept or epistemological practice, which goes on to attempt to contain the results of this analysis (for example, the datum that arose which the first concept could not subsume). This further concept or epistemological practice is then itself critiqued until it reveals its insufficiency, and so on. The 'interwovenness' of concepts derives from the fact that, in the course of attempting to comprehend the object, each concept fails and, in its failure, summons other concepts.

It is this 'interwovenness' which Adorno elsewhere gestures towards in his assertions that the 'texture' (*Gewebe*) of dialectical thought serves as the criterion of its success (ND 35 / 45, 33 / 44). The German term *Gewebe* is associated with fabric, and capable of being translated as 'tissue' or 'weave', as well as 'texture'. These connotations are informative. If one considers the weave of a piece of fabric, one sees that it is constituted by multiple strands, all of which go together to form the finished piece. Similarly, the 'texture' of thought is constituted by its bringing together, in the course of its comprehension of its subject matter, all of the relevant concepts and philosophical positions, in order to form a complex and complete instantiation of the subject matter. Comprehension of the object is not merely a 'deductive or inductive course' (ND 33 / 44), but is in fact achieved in the 'density of [the] texture' (ND: 35 / 45) of the thought. Which is to say, the object is comprehended insofar as thought thoroughly elaborates the multiple conceptual connections which the object entails, instead of merely subsuming it under one concept, or one epistemological practice (be that philosophical, empirical, etc.).

This position of Adorno's, wherein genuine comprehension of the object entails conceptual constellations, or 'texture', I have called 'texturalism'. As was shown in the extract cited above (Adorno 1984: 110), Adorno believes that this 'interwovenness' of concepts – the fact that the object cannot be subsumed under one concept alone, but in fact demands a 'texture' of concepts in order to be properly comprehended – is a property of the experienced object itself. As such, the rhetorical device of the convulsive leap from epistemological practice to practice in consideration of a topic is not *mere* rhetoric but in fact a philosophically significant constituent in Adorno's work -

Dialectics – literally: language as the organon of thought – would mean to

attempt a critical rescue of the rhetorical element, a mutual approximation of thing and expression, to the point where the difference fades [...] In dialectics, contrary to popular opinion, *the rhetorical element is on the side of content*. (ND: 56 / 66, emphasis mine)

The rhetorical texture of Adorno's work, then, is constituted by a kind of destructive phenomenology. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* generated the breakdown of forms of consciousness (each of which was an attempt to know the world), simply by watching these attempts to know break down in the course of their application to the world. Crucially, for Hegel, 'truth is attainable by surveying the breakdown of each appearance into its successor [...] until we reach absolute [knowledge]' (Inwood 2003: 216). For Hegel, while his *Phenomenology* is a passive enterprise, it is also a *positive* one – each observed breakdown gives rise to a new, superior form of consciousness, and continues the advance towards absolute knowledge, in which concept and object are in perfect conformity.

For Adorno, by contrast, the phenomenological method does not generate new, improved concepts out of the observed breakdown of the old. Each candidate epistemological practice or perspective in the topic object's 'constellation' is engaged and employed immanently in the text. However, in the course of this displayed engagement of the given practice, a difficulty arises which is only soluble by the transition from that practice (which, remember, understands itself as exhaustive) to another. This process is repeated until each of the candidate practices has revealed itself to be, in itself, insufficient (or, as Adorno puts it, 'purely subjective rigging' (Adorno 2000: 110)). Adorno's phenomenology is *destructive*, then, as it terminates in a display of falsity, rather than an improvement in the conformity between concept and object.

The performativity of the *text*, then, derives from its performing, in its rhetorical 'texture', the conceptual insufficiencies (antinomies, contradictions, etc.) which it refers to. The text does not merely refer to these conceptual difficulties, but in fact instantiates them by virtue of its phenomenological procedure. Each epistemological practice is engaged until, by virtue of its own constitution, it fails. The text rhetorically instantiates, then, the insufficiencies inherent in the concepts concerning the topic under consideration.

### **3.15 From Rhetoric to Break**

We have established, then, that Adorno's philosophical works represent a textual instantiation of the conceptual insufficiencies found in the concepts and epistemological practices which are available to try and comprehend the topic of those philosophical

works. The 'texture' which Adorno posited as the arbiter of the philosophical work's accuracy, then, turns out to refer to the work's instantiation of the failure and mutual entailment of all of the available practices which refer to and attempt to exhaust a given topic. But how does this texture of the work give rise to the desired 'break'? As we saw above, Adorno posited that the end of his dialectical procedure was not merely to register the failures of the existing epistemological whole, but to *break out of* this epistemological whole. At present, the destructive phenomenology of Adorno's philosophical texts would appear to provide only an unusual way of giving an account of the present epistemological failures – it would not appear to present any way of breaking with the epistemological set-up which gave rise to them.

This difficulty is solved by reconsidering the role of the agent. We have already seen in section 3.11, that the agent's performative vitalization of the given philosophical text is not merely a registering of what is present in that text, but in fact a constituting element in the truth of that text itself. This role of the agent can be seen as providing the extra ingredient which translates the text's rhetorical mirroring of existing conceptual insufficiencies into the desired 'break'.

The agent and text are conceptually isomorphic. We saw from our examination of the social universality of conceptual arrays that, at a given time, all agents will possess the same conceptual array. As such, then, the author of *Negative Dialectics* and the reader possess the same conceptual array, with the same conceptual difficulties, inconsistencies and insufficiencies inhering in that array. The author of *Negative Dialectics* traces the immanent insufficiencies in each of the epistemological practices which purport to analyze the given topic, and instantiates these in the text. The text, then, constitutes a destructive phenomenological display of the available epistemological material which describes and appeals to identical concepts owned by the reader. As such, the reader has the same conceptual structure, with the same latent contradictions, as the text.

If we combine this isomorphism with what we already know about the text and agent, we can see clearly how a break results. We saw that the text does not merely assert these conceptual break-downs – it *performs* them, immanently in a destructively phenomenological approach (section 3.14). Furthermore, the reader does not merely passively register what is present in the text – rather, he internalizes it, and performs it (section 3.11). As such, then, the agent *internally* performs what is in the text – namely, an exhaustive display of the insufficiency of all conceptual material available to cognize the topic of the text.

The agent, then, employs his concepts (in accordance with the text's performative immanent employment of the concepts) and discovers that the concepts

fail. The concept fails in the course of its employment, just due to its own constitution. This is repeated for each of the concepts presented in the course of the text's analysis. The conceptual breakdown which is instantiated in the text's theoretic context is re-instantiated in the course of the concept's actual employment by the agent. The agent attempts to cognize the object, using his concepts (which, remember, take themselves to be able to exhaust their object) and discovers that all of his available epistemological practices fail. It is important to note here is that the agent is not *told* that his concepts fail – the concepts *themselves* fail, in the course of their employment. The break is effected via a dialectic between the performativity of the *text* (the text's rhetorical, phenomenological instantiation of the failure of concepts) and the performativity of the *agent* (whose concepts are engaged by the text's presentation of its material, and induced into failing).

### 3.16 Break

But how does this failure in the agent's concepts in the course of their employment serve to effect a break with the false epistemological whole? For Adorno, there is no apparent distinction, as there is for Kant, between transcendental and empirical concepts. Which is to say, all concepts play an equal role in the mediation of experience. Just this is presupposed by Adorno's commitment to the idea that all immediacy is in fact constituted by and determined by mediacy. As the agent's experience of any given object is occluded by the effect of identity thinking on his concept of the object, it stands to reason that this concept is not only theoretically employable, but in fact mediates his experience of that object. The concepts which the agent employs, then, in the course of attempting to cognize an object serve both as a means of acquiring knowledge and as that which mediates experience and makes continuous experience possible. We saw in the previous section that the agent's internal performance of the philosophical text entails that his concepts fail in the course of their employment. When the agent performatively interrogates the philosophical text, the conceptual failures present in the text are isomorphic to conceptual failures latent in the agent's own conceptual array. The agent's performance of the text internally leads to these conceptual failures which are displayed on the page being *effected* internally, in the agent's conceptual array. His concepts, which mediate his experience, fail: which is to say, they fail to subsume their object.

As such, then, the *theoretical* conceptual failure which is instantiated in the philosophical text is, by virtue of the performative role of the agent, re-instantiated in *experience*. This is how the flash of comprehension is differentiated from the discursive, 'mathematical model' which Adorno refers to (ND: 64 / 72). Rather than

being confronted with a complex of assertions (which assert that concepts fail) that are justified by standards of induction, deduction etc., the agent *experiences* this conceptual failure. Adorno provides clear exegetical support for this account of the non-conceptual being accessed experientially (as opposed to theoretically), by means of failing concepts -

We might say that the non-conceptual itself, when we approach it for the first time, when we grapple with it, is already mediated by concepts in a negative sense – it is the neglected, the excluded; and the fact that the concept has not granted it access tells us something about [...] the obstacles imposed by the concept. (Adorno 2010: 69)

The concept's being confronted with an object which resists conceptual subsumption, then, serves as an encounter with the non-conceptual (non-identical). This failure of the concept is for the agent not merely a theoretical break but also a disruption of the transcendental grounds of his continuous experience. The object is experienced as uncapturable by the agent's conceptual array. The agent, then, *experiences* an object which cannot be exhausted by his concepts. This constitutes the desired breakout of the false epistemological whole just because the constitutive element of the false epistemology – the identification of the concept with the object – is made impossible. The agent is confronted with an object completely resistant to conceptual subsumption. As such, he will experience the complete insufficiency of his concepts, with regards to the considered object.

All of the concepts in the agent's conceptual array relevant to the object under consideration are engaged, and induced to fail. This does not entail a display of the falsity of the *entirety* of the conceptual array; there will remain any number of concepts possessed by the agent which will not have been engaged by the dialectical critique in question. (Dialectical constellations are finite – they only include those concepts related to comprehension of the topic). However, it will serve to acquaint the agent with the insufficiency of an area of his conceptual array. All of the candidate concepts for comprehension of a given object will prove unable to subsume that object. This serves as a hammer blow to the constitutive idea of identity thinking – that concepts can exhaust their objects without remainder.

The combination of the performativity of the text (its phenomenological display of the inherent insufficiency of concepts) and the performativity of the agent (the agent's mirroring the text in the actual employment of his own conceptual faculties) results in a break. The conceptual contradictions in the text are by themselves

insufficient for a break – this is due to the holistic theory of falsity outlined earlier. If the agent were merely to read and register a set of assertions concerning the fallibility of concepts, his experience of these assertions (as mediated by concepts) would entail the ultimate falsification of these assertions. The agent's performance, however, dodges the problem of the holistic theory of falsity by not taking place by virtue of assertions or explicit theoretical programmes (which are vulnerable to the delusive influence of the concept, reification, etc.) but instead by effecting a break in the concept itself, and thereby not being subject to its delusive influence. Performativity, then, satisfies Adorno's desideratum that dialectics result in a break with the false epistemological practice by virtue of the strength of that false epistemological practice. As such, it would appear to be a plausible explanation for Adorno's theory of the true. However, we now need to explain how this performative break can be meaningfully termed true.

### **3.17 Problem 2) How is this performative creation of a 'break' true?**

As explained above, the break is constituted by the agent's experience of an object which causes all of his available relevant conceptual tools to fail. The agent's concepts, as has been explained, have a twofold role – that of making knowledge possible (their theoretic role) and that of making continuous experience possible (their transcendental role). Accordingly, the truth of the performative break with these concepts is twofold. It is true by *demonstration*, and it is true by *acquaintance*.

First, then, we see that the agent has demonstrated to him, through his performative engagement with the text, that *any* presently possible conceptual practice is incapable of exhausting the currently considered object. This demonstration is *true* because it demonstrates to the agent that the socially universal conceptual array is in fact inherently incapable of grasping the considered object – the conceptual array presents itself to the agent as exhausting that object, but is in fact completely unable to do so. However, it is important to note again that this truth is made possible by virtue of its being performative and not assertoric or theoretical. As we saw in sections 3.4 – 3.10, any positive assertion (including 'the epistemological whole is false') is ultimately falsified by Adorno's holistic theory of falsity, due to the delusive influence of the governing concepts, reification, etc. As such, any *assertion* of the falsity of the socially universal conceptual array would itself be falsified by virtue of the conceptual mediation which allowed that assertion to be comprehended. The performative *demonstration* of this falsity, however, escapes this difficulty and allows for the diremption between all presently available concepts in the socially universal conceptual array and the candidate object to be comprehended without thereby being falsified by the concept.

This break, then, is true as it allows for the genuine comprehension of the falsity of the part of the epistemological whole relevant to the considered object. The performative break is the only medium for an escape from the falsifying influence of the epistemological whole, and the only medium for the perception of its falsity, its insufficiency in relation to the object in question. It is true, then, by virtue of demonstrating (and being the only way of demonstrating) the falsity of all other, presently available, non-dialectical forms of knowledge with reference to the considered object.

Secondly, we come to knowledge by acquaintance, which is entailed by the concept's transcendental role. As has already been explained in the previous section, the continual breakdown of each concept successively applied to the object being cognized not only prevents the application of the concept in a theoretic sense, but also prevents that concept's successfully mediating the agent's experience of that object. As such, the agent's experience of that object, which induces concepts to fail in the course of their attempt to cognize that object, is not wholly conceptually mediated. The agent, then, is experientially acquainted with something which cannot be subsumed or experientially mediated by the concept. In other words, then, the agent has an experience of something non-conceptual – viz., the non-identical.

The performative break, then, serves to acquaint the agent with the non-identical. The *effect* of this acquaintance assuredly reinforces the demonstrative effect of the performative break – viz., informing the agent that his concepts are not in fact in this case sufficient – by virtue of acquainting the agent with something which is not capturable by the concept. As such, this acquaintance with the non-identical also stands as true in the same sense as the demonstrative element of the performative break. It displays the falsity of the governing conceptual array without this display being subject to the delusive influence of that governing array.

Now that we have established that the performative reading of Adorno's theory of truth is plausible, we must now turn to the third problem – why should we *want* to read Adorno in this way?

### **3.18 Problem 3) Why should we want to construe this as Adorno's theory of the true? What is the benefit?**

While I believe I have demonstrated that my reading of Adorno's theory of the true as performative is coherent and consistent with his work, which is recommendation in itself, I believe there is a further, pressing reason that we should want to read his theory of the true in this way. To see why this is so, we first need to review what we discovered in the previous two Chapters. Namely, that all experience is conceptually mediated and

that those mediating concepts are inherently delusive. As we saw in sections 3.4 – 3.10, this entails that the truth cannot be positively expressed in any form. Any attempt to express the truth positively will ultimately become false, due to its imbrication with a wholly false totality, which serves as the grounds of the possibility of any assertion whatsoever. The strength of these falsifying forces, and the attendant impossibility of the positive expression of the true, would appear to leave us with two choices. First, one could jettison conceptuality altogether, and posit the true as accessible through some unorthodox, privileged medium which, being non-rational and non-conceptual, would be free of the baleful effects of the delusive concepts. This would amount to irrationalism. This is not a viable reading of Adorno; Adorno vituperatively rejects irrationalism.<sup>52</sup> Secondly, one could abandon any theory of the truth as expressible in-itself, and instead confine oneself wholly to the negative philosophical project of demolishing all positive philosophical projects. This would result in Adorno's philosophy being arrested in a state of scepticism, with its role being only the identification of internal inconsistencies, antinomies, and so on.

This latter reading of Adorno is also unworkable, although less incompatible with Adorno's philosophical project than irrationalism. While Adorno's philosophical project is assuredly negative, and does conduct itself as a search for inconsistencies, antinomies, and so on, it does in fact also exceed this merely sceptical project. One example of Adorno's apparent reversion to positivity was investigated above, in section 3.11. It must also be noted that Adorno did not understand his philosophical project as merely sceptical, and in fact explicitly rejected scepticism -

In principle, philosophy can always go astray, which is the sole reason why it can go forward. This has been recognized in skepticism and in pragmatism, most recently in Dewey's wholly humane version of the latter; but we ought to add it as a ferment to an emphatic philosophy instead of renouncing philosophy, from the outset, in favor of the test it has to stand.  
(ND: 14 / 25)

Bourgeois scepticism, which relativism as a doctrine embodies, is perverse.  
(ND: 37 / 47, translation modified).

It would seem, then, that Adorno did not construe his critical project as merely an ongoing project of the demolition of other philosophical positions. Rather, he held his

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<sup>52</sup> See particularly (DE: 71 -72)



philosophy to be an attempt to construe and comprehend the true – that is, the non-identical. He posits this expression of the non-identical as exceeding the mere negative criticism of other philosophical positions -

Just as riddle-solving is constituted, in that the singular and dispersed elements of the question are brought into various groupings long enough for them to close together in a figure out of which the solution springs forth [...] so philosophy has to bring its elements [...] into changing constellations [...] until they fall into a figure which can be read as *an answer*. (Adorno 1977: 32, emphasis mine).

In this extract, Adorno is alleging that the negative philosophical project does not arrest itself merely with the negative criticism of the inconsistencies in other positions, but in fact serves as a method of instantiating and *comprehending* the non-identical; of delivering 'an answer'. However, our examination of negativity in section 3.4 – 3.10 would appear to rule out the positive expression of anything true, due to the falsifying influence of the concept. We would appear to be without any method of making sense of Adorno's belief in this flash of comprehension. Either, it would seem, this flash is comprehended by means of the concept, in which case it is false, or it takes place outside of the concept, in which case it is irrational and hence, for Adorno, false also. We appear, then, to be caught in a dilemma. This dilemma is recognized obliquely by Adorno in *Lectures on Negative Dialectics* -

[I]f we have no confidence in the feasibility of such a break-out from the sphere of the manufactured concept into the non-conceptual realm essentially belonging to that concept, this would rule out philosophizing of any kind [...] we would achieve the utopia of cognition [i.e., circumvent this problem] not by means of some allegedly superior non-conceptual methods, but by unlocking the non-conceptual by means of the concept, and the self-criticism of concepts – without reducing what has been comprehended, the non-conceptual, to concepts by main force. (Adorno 2010: 73 – 74)

Adorno himself, then, recognizes this fundamental dilemma which is produced by his unequivocal positing of concepts as falsifying. It leaves two apparent possibilities, the skeptical (ruling 'out philosophizing of any kind') or the irrational (positing 'some allegedly superior non-conceptual methods'). Adorno posits the escape from this dilemma as 'unlocking the non-conceptual by means of the concept'. In the foregoing,

we have been able to fill in the detail of this proposed escape from the dilemma, by means of a third epistemological category – namely, that of the performance. By identifying access to the true with the performance, Adorno allows us to *employ* the delusive conceptual make-up of experience not merely in order to construct negative critiques of other positions, but in fact in order to allow for an access to the true, viz. the non-identical. As such, my reading of Adorno as holding the true to be effected by a performance allows for the expression of the true in a flash of comprehension (i.e., the agent's experience) while avoiding positing Adorno's work as merely sceptical or irrational.

We should want to understand Adorno's theory of truth as performative, then, as it allows us to circumvent the most fundamental and serious dilemma of his philosophy – namely, the dilemma of scepticism and irrationalism.

### **3.19 Partiality and Ongoing Critique**

There are two issues with this picture of Adorno's theory of the true which I will now clarify before ending the Chapter. The first, considered in this section, is an issue concerning the scope of the conceptual critique effected by the performatively true. The second, in the following section, will concern the compatibility of my picture with Adorno's understanding of truth as socio-historically relative.

Mentioned above in sections 3.16 – 3.17, but not explored in full detail, was the fact that this performative break with conceptuality does not entail an experience of the falsity of all concepts, but merely those relevant to the object under consideration. Put differently, this performative break does not acquaint one with the falsity of all conceptuality and identity thinking *simpliciter*. Rather, it serves to demonstrate the unworkability of the available concepts, employed in accordance with identity thinking, insofar as they attempt to subsume without remainder the subject of the considered philosophical critique.

This might seem somewhat unambitious. Adorno held out the promise of breaking with identity thinking 'in its own measure' (ND: 5 / 17). However, the picture I have given is somewhat more partial – rather than breaking with identity thinking as a whole, once and for all, we have instead an experience of its insufficiency in one area. The delusive conceptual array is not, as a *whole* critiqued – rather, its specific insufficiency in *one area* (be that philosophy of mind, freedom, etc.) is experienced. As such, the end result of Adorno's theory of performative truth (on my reading) is not a complete critique of identity thinking as it obtains in its entirety, but rather the display of the unworkability of a given section of the conceptual array created by identity thinking.

While the experience of the non-identical could not facilitate a one-place

inference to the intrinsic insufficiency of all identity thinking and conceptuality, it does serve to weaken the claim of identity thinking. It displays that concepts are in fact unable to subsume given phenomena and therefore begins to build a case against the presumption of the adequacy between concept and object. As a result, this theory of the performatively true entails an ongoing project of dialectical critique and performative engagement, which continually engages differing areas of knowledge and displays the failure of the available concepts.

This partiality – the inability of the performatively true to indict the whole of the conceptual array, to indict identity thinking *simpliciter* – entails a continual undermining of identity thinking by repeatedly performatively demonstrating the breakdown of concepts. This is not problematic, simply because it properly models Adorno's philosophical project. The voracious nature of Adorno's work – taking in metaphysics, moral philosophy, epistemology, etc. – demonstrates his commitment not to a single display of the falsity of identity thinking, but an ongoing project of aiming blows at identity thinking in an attempt to undermine it, and loosen its grip.

### 3.20 The Historicity of the True

In closing, I should just like to demonstrate the compatibility of the account here given with Adorno's theory of the socio-historical sensitivity of the true. Adorno repeatedly asserts that the true cannot be ahistorically grasped, and that no assertion or set of assertions can be said to hold indefinitely. Rather, all truths are vulnerable to socio-historical changes which may render them false. Now that we have laid out Adorno's theory of the true in its full structural complexity, and moreover established the true as an experience of the break-down in one's conceptual array, where can we locate this socio-historical sensitivity? This concern may be exacerbated by the fact that we have posited the true as an experience. If truth is meaningfully socio-historically sensitive it must be able to both come into being and cease to obtain.<sup>53</sup> However, if the truth is an *experience*, it appears to be immediate, and to not be meaningfully dependent for its truth-status on its discursive grounds. As such, it might appear to be difficult to introduce a socio-historically sensitive element to the truth-conditionality of that experience. The following may be an informative analogy. A sense-datum theorist takes the meaning of the experience of redness to be exhausted just by the experience of redness, this experience having no necessary (or even necessarily explanatory) relationship to its ground (to that which caused the experience to have the property of

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<sup>53</sup> 'We do not stand by everything we said in [Dialectic of Enlightenment ...] in its original form. That would be incompatible with a theory which attributes a temporal core to truth instead of contrasting truth as something invariable to the movement of history.' (DE: xi)

redness). The experience of red retains its status (as a red experience) just by virtue of its nature as being an experience of red. Once a given experience at time  $t$  has been identified as being of red, and was in fact so coupled with a redness experience, there would seem to be no way to make this truth temporally sensitive.

Analogously, then, the worry for the experience of the true at time  $t$  would be that an experience of the true, qua experience which includes an acquaintance with the true, legitimates itself as true in a way which was not historically sensitive. Its truth would be predicated simply on its being an experience of its object, the non-identical. As such, there would seem to be no meaningful way in which to assert that it could forfeit its truth over time, just as my having an experience of redness at time  $t$  would seem to be invulnerable to becoming false over time. This difficulty can be overcome, however, if we consider once again the relationship which Adorno posits between immediacy and mediacy, and between the 'flash' experience of the true and its discursive grounds.

As we have seen above, the immediate experience of the true bears a determinate and necessary relationship to its discursive grounds (section 3.11). These grounds are a textual instantiation of a destructively phenomenological analysis of the aporias, contradictions, etc. which obtain in a conceptual array. It is this textual performance which is isomorphic to contradictions, aporias, etc. obtaining in the agent's own conceptual array which provide the materials for the agent's internal performance of these conceptual contradictions. As we have seen repeatedly in the course of this examination (see Chapters 1 and 2) concepts are not autarkically constituted, but in fact constituted by extra-conceptual processes, such as socio-historical developments, self-preservation as exercised in a social context, etc. As such, given any development in any of these meta-logical determining influences on the concept, the conceptual array will alter, as will the constitution of the concepts which make up the conceptual set. As such, old contradictions will disappear and new ones will be produced.

Given this action of meta-logical determination on the concepts, we see that aporias, contradictions, etc., are in fact contingent and socio-historically specific. From this follows the obvious conclusion that a philosophical text which performatively instantiates a given conceptual contradiction or set of aporias, etc., will, given a shift in the conceptual array of the kind just detailed, cease to be effective. Which is to say that the conceptual contradictions and difficulties thus outlined in the text will *cease to be isomorphic with the agent's own conceptual array*. From this follows that, should the agent read the discursive philosophical text, he will not be able to induce it to performatively produce an experience of the non-identical. This follows simply because there is no longer any congruence between the material and the cognitive structure

with which which it is trying to engage. The text attempts to engage and manipulate concepts of a given form and array imbrication which simply are no longer present in the agent. As such, we can confidently build in socio-historicity on *this* level – philosophical texts, which are the basis for experiences of the true, can come to fail to produce that experience over time.

While we have built in socio-historicity at the level of the grounds of the experience of the true, and hence coherently satisfied the need for a systematic support for Adorno's statement that philosophical texts lose their truth over time (DE: xi), there still remains an objection, although I think it is rather thin. This objection is that while we have proved the grounds of the experience of the non-identical to be socio-historically sensitive, we identified the *experience* of the non-identical as the carrier of truth. As such, the truth remains an experience with no necessary reference to its grounds (cf. our analogy with the sense-datum theorist) and as such remains ahistorically true. The statement 'the experience at time  $t$  was an experience of the truth, albeit one which is not now repeatable from the same grounds' remains ahistorically true, regardless of socio-historical grounds.

I believe there are two responses to this difficulty. The first, conciliatory one would be to simply agree with our antagonist. It is indeed the case that the experience of the truth at time  $t$  remains true, although it is now not producible from the same grounds. However, this putative atemporality is so attenuated and qualified that it does not provide a contradiction with Adorno's fundamental tenet that truth is historical. The historicity of the true does not entail that truths indexically linked to a given time cease to be true; rather, it entails that experiences of the true come to be unattainable via given texts and assertions over time.

However, while this response is adequate and coherent with Adorno's theory, I believe we should reject it, for the simple reason that it is untrue. The tacit assumption of such a response (and, indeed, of the critique itself) is that the grounds of the experience of the true function like Wittgenstein's ladder – being employed in order to acquire an experience of the true, and then being discarded and not showing up in that experience itself. However, I believe that this is a misreading of the relationship between the experience of the true and its grounds, which ignores the dialectical relationship which obtains between the two.

Now, we have been careful to sharply distinguish between the experience of the true and the grounds of that experience, and to clearly separate them, just because of the falsifying nature of conceptuality, for Adorno. Were we to leave any doubt that the experience of the true could in some way be subject to the conceptual grounds of its possibility, the suspicion would instantly arise that in fact Adorno's theory of truth was

first not truly negative, and secondly that it would be subject to his holistic theory of falsity. All this being said, however, we must take care not to obscure the dialectical relationship which obtains between this experience of truth and its discursive grounds. The experience of the true is both radically different to its conceptual, discursive grounds and constituted by them.

The experience of the true is predicated on and *conducts itself by means of* the conceptual, discursive grounds and their outlay of a given set of conceptual aporias, contradictions, etc. We saw that the experience of the insufficiency of concepts does not come into being as *causa sui* but in fact derives from the experience of the evident insufficiency of the concepts involved in the specific analysis contained in a given philosophical text. The experience of the true, then, is inherently one of a transition from a given realized conceptual breakdown, to a perception of a conceptual insufficiency. The experience of the insufficiency of the available concepts, then, is not segmented and separated from the particular discursive analysis, nor is it sustainable without it. Rather, this claim is constituted and conducted by means of the particular discursive analyses which give rise to it. As such, the experience of the true inherently refers to the particular, discursive claim.

Once we see that this experience of the true in fact comprises two moments, the particular conceptual analysis and the resulting experience of an object unmediated by concepts, we can see that it in fact is straightforwardly socio-historically sensitive. The experience is constituted by a transition from a particular set of conceptual difficulties to a perception of the conceptual insufficiency of the available conceptual materials. The particular set of conceptual difficulties is predicated on the conceptual analyses contained in the philosophical text. We have already seen above that this element of the true (the particular analyses contained in the philosophical text) is thoroughly socio-historically sensitive. The analysis fails to obtain as socio-historical developments take place and the attendant constitution of the conceptual array alters. Once this falsification takes place, the experience, comprising a twofold moment both textual and experiential, is partially falsified, resulting in the falsity of the experience as a whole. The experience, of moving from the particular performative conceptual analysis to the encounter with the non-identical is no longer legitimate. The particular moment of the experience (the analyses of conceptual aporias, etc.) no longer serves to create a transition to the moment of the experience of the non-identical. This is so just because the contradictions which caused the agent's concepts to fail no longer obtain. As such, the agent's available conceptual apparatus is no longer brought to fail in the course of analyzing the given object, and as such the object does not defy conceptual subsumption. As such, a failure of conceptuality is not instantiated, and the

agent thereby does not experience an object unsubsumed by concepts.<sup>54</sup> The movement between the particular and universal moment was warranted by the obtaining conceptual array; with the erasure of that array over time, that movement has become illegitimate and incomprehensible, rather than merely unrepeatable.

The experience is no longer *intelligible*, then, as it appeals to a transmission from conceptual critique to experience of the non-identical which is no longer comprehensible, given the change in the mediated nature of experience. While it remains true that one had that experience at time *t*, one's having had that experience is no longer comprehensible. The experience is inherently constituted by a transmission from particular analyses to an experience of the insufficiency of the relevant conceptual apparatus and, consequently, a breakdown of the conceptual mediation of one's experience. This transmission derives from the concrete analyses being isomorphic with the agent's own conceptual array. Once this isomorphism fails to obtain, the experience of that concrete analysis rendering up a conceptual break becomes unintelligible, as it appeals to a form of experience structured in a way that no longer obtains. It is constituted by a conceptual array which no longer obtains.

The *experience* of the true is also socio-historically sensitive, then. While, unlike the conceptual analysis in the particular philosophical text, it is not made untrue simply by the absence of its referents, it is rather rendered incomprehensible, by virtue of the absence of the conceptual array it would have to appeal to for meaning.

### 3.21 Conclusion

The preceding two Chapters set out the complex conceptual mediation which Adorno held to be a necessary feature of experience, as well as the falsification which Adorno held to ineluctably follow from the employment of those concepts. This situated the unique problem of Adorno's theory of the true – namely, that the true appears to preclude its own expression, on pain of the true's becoming false. The present Chapter has been a consideration of how Adorno is able, despite these difficulties, to prevent his theory of truth being merely an account of truth's impossibility. As I hope has been shown, the reading of Adorno expounded in this Chapter is thoroughly consistent with the exegetical evidence. Moreover, it also appears to be a unique theory of truth,

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<sup>54</sup> It is clear that the transition from the particular moment of the textual critique to the experience of the non-identical itself can only be accomplished if the entirety of the available and relevant conceptual apparatus is defied by the object of comprehension. If this is not so, the object will be subsumed under a concept and, in merely experiencing an object which defies subsumption by a limited set of concepts, the agent will take himself to have experienced a contingent and small-scale conceptual difficulty, rather than taking himself to have experienced the fundamental insufficiency of all currently available conceptual employment as relevant to that object.

hitherto unencountered. It might appear, then, as if my consideration of Adorno's theory of truth is at a close. However, the discussion of Adorno's theory of truth is not yet complete, as one of the most unique features of Adorno's texturalism has yet to be examined.

The theory of truth treated in this Chapter has been related entirely to an explicitly theoretical form of discourse, namely philosophy. It has been considered insofar as it allows or prevents given assertions to be termed true. However, I hold that the theory of truth here outlined also applies outside of the explicitly discursive attempts to instantiate truth. In short, I hold that the textural theory of truth here outlined also provides a theory of *aesthetic* truth. Moreover, this theory of truth *must* be applied to Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*.

In being so applied, there will be two core benefits. First, Adorno's criterion of aesthetic truth – the 'shudder' – and its relation to the non-identical will be made clear, as an aesthetic instantiation of the philosophical mode of instantiating the non-identical. This has the result, then, that Adorno's assertion that the artwork has truth-content receives a thorough explication, and philosophical support. Furthermore, it also serves simply as a thorough explanation of Adorno's aesthetic analyses considered in isolation. Secondly, the relationship between Adorno's philosophical and aesthetic analyses will be elucidated. Adorno's implicit reliance on the congruity between aesthetic and philosophical categories is notable, and stands in need of justification. This will provide a legitimation for Adorno's application of philosophical terminology to aesthetic analyses and vice versa. This also has the corollary that the two accounts, the philosophical and the aesthetic, which Adorno gives of truth will be brought into a mutually supporting relationship as two instantiations of the same theory of truth. As such, each account will support the other.

The following final Chapter, then, will constitute an application of the theory of truth here outlined to Adorno's aesthetic philosophy. In successfully showing that Adorno's theory of aesthetic truth is merely the application of the theory of truth here outlined in an aesthetic mode, the centrality and explanatory value of my reading of Adorno's theory of truth will be consolidated.



## **4. –Aesthetic Truth-Content and Oblique Second Reflection**

### **4.1 Introduction**

At the close of Chapter 3, we had established a reading of Adorno's theory of truth which held the true, for Adorno, to be accessible only by the combination of a thorough critique of the delusive mediators of experience and the agent's own performative engagement with that critique. The result of this combination, it was argued, constituted access to the non-identical. In the present Chapter, I will be attempting to demonstrate that this account should be seen as germane not only to Adorno's philosophy *simpliciter*, but also to Adorno's aesthetics. In other words, I am going to attempt to show that Adorno has a unified (which is not to say undifferentiated) account of truth-content, which is intended to apply both to philosophical texts and to artworks.

The attempt to demonstrate the unity of aesthetic and philosophical truth-content is problematized by the rhetorically rebarbative organization of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*. Adorno employs a number of terms, derived from a number of aesthetic philosophies, without providing explicit definitions of these terms. Rather than receiving static stipulative definitions, these terms are intended to derive their meaning solely from the variety of ways in which they are employed, in the variety of contexts in which Adorno employs them. An exhaustive account of Adorno's application of these terms – 'expression', 'construction', 'semblance', etc. – would constitute a thesis in itself. Due to the constraints of space, I will have to bypass this, and thus much of the richness of Adorno's aesthetic philosophy, in order to focus solely on those elements of Adorno's aesthetics which are presently relevant.

As a consequence, in the course of my attempt to demonstrate the unity of aesthetic and philosophical truth-content, I will confine myself solely to the examination of Adorno's theory of aesthetic truth-content, and the relationship he establishes between art and the non-identical. The account given in the present Chapter, then, will bypass giving a full account of the constitution of the aesthetic, and instead jump directly into the problem of the relationship between aesthetic and philosophical truth.

### **4.2 Art, Truth, and Knowledge**

In order to begin, however, we must note that the project of this Chapter – to explain the relationship between art and truth – stands in need of justification. What reason have we to theorize any relationship between art and truth, for Adorno? In fact, Adorno explicitly and repeatedly posits art as bearing truth-content -

[A]rt is nevertheless the truth of society insofar as in its most authentic products the irrationality of the rational world order is expressed. (AT: 111)

In this initial extract, Adorno straightforwardly asserts that art is, in itself, 'truth'; moreover, this truth is seen to be socially critical. Adorno asserts that the truth of art is, in essence, criticism – it forms a critique of the 'irrationality of the rational world order'. It is important to note, here, that this *social* criticism provided by the artwork is always already *epistemological* simultaneously. Adorno makes it clear that the artwork does not merely criticize society, but the rationality of the underlying structure which makes that society possible. This combination of art's truth, and the translation of this truth into a simultaneously social and epistemological critique, will go on to be highly important (and problematic) later on in the present Chapter (cf. sections 4.5 – 4.17).

[T]ruth content presents itself in art as a multiplicity, not as the concept that abstractly subordinates artworks. The bond of the truth content of art to its works and the multiplicity of what surpasses identification accord. (AT: 173)

Again, here we have Adorno explicitly making the claim that artworks bear truth content. In addition, we have Adorno's assertion that the artwork bears this truth content through an accord to that which 'surpasses identification'. This, again, will become highly significant later on; it represents an example of Adorno's (often tacit) identification of the truth content of the artwork with the non-identical. Adorno is here clearly beginning to position the truth content of the artwork not merely as socially-cum-epistemologically critical (cf. (AT: 111)), but also as an instantiation of the non-identical (cf. (AT: 173)). This combination of socio-epistemological critique and non-identical instantiation already puts Adorno's theory of art's truth content into close accord with his account of the relationship between philosophy and truth. This accord, which is already apparent, will be filled in with more detail as this Chapter progresses.

It is, then, quite apparent at this point that Adorno posits the artwork as true, and moreover, places this truth into a socio-epistemologically critical and non-identical instantiating context. It is important also to note that Adorno explicitly rules out the artwork's relationship to truth as being irrational. Rather, Adorno takes the artwork to constitutively take part in rationality –

Art is rationality that criticizes rationality without withdrawing from it; art is not something prerational or irrational, which would peremptorily condemn

it as untruth in the face of the entanglement of all human activity in the social totality. Rational and irrational theories of art are therefore equally faulty. (AT: 71)

The artwork for Adorno, then, maintains the critical function outlined in (AT: 111), but explicitly does so not by 'withdrawing from [rationality]'. Adorno makes it clear that art does not exit the problematic of rationality in order to effect its critique – 'art is not something prerational or irrational'. This is important to note just because it entails that, like philosophy, art is not able to exit the problematic of rationality, which is falsified by identity thinking.

It should be noted that Adorno does clearly state that the artwork is not merely rational, in his assertion that '[r]ational and irrational theories of art are [...] equally faulty' (AT: 71), but also clearly nonetheless rationally constituted ('Art is rationality that [...] (AT: 71)). This raises the question of why, if art is rational, it cannot be captured by a rational theory of art.

Further sense will be given to this quirk of Adorno's theory of art (its being rational and yet not merely rational) when I demonstrate in sections 4.12 – 4.17, that the artwork is in fact a dialectical critique (just as philosophy is). As a consequence, while the artwork is rational, it is not *merely* rational, as it dialectically employs rationality in such a way that it gives rise to a break in concepts and access to the extra-conceptual non-identical.

#### **4.3 Knowledge and the Non-Identical**

While we have construed art as rational, and as knowledge, and come across some hints in Adorno's work that the truth of art coincides with an instantiation of the non-identical, we still need to make this fully explicit in order to have sufficient justification for proceeding to attempt to take Adorno as having a unified theory of philosophical and aesthetic truth-content. Put differently, the congruity between Adorno's theory of aesthetic and philosophical truth will be clearer once we have a clear demonstration that, like philosophy, the knowledge of art is knowledge of the non-identical. Adorno in fact provides explicit confirmation of this thought -

The new wants non-identity, yet intention reduces it to identity; modern art constantly works at the Münchhausen trick of carrying out the identification of the non-identical. (AT: 29)

This extract serves as a direct statement by Adorno of the constitutive function of the

artwork – namely, attempting to instantiate, by virtue of the identity-thinking which governs its sphere of activity, the non-identical. While we will at a later stage interrogate how this instantiation is intended to be possible, it is important to note here the closeness of Adorno's articulation of the role of art concerning the true, to his articulation of the role of philosophy -

To change [the] direction of conceptuality, to give it a turn toward nonidentity, is the hinge of negative dialectics. (ND: 12 / 24)

Here, as in the case of art, we have the assertion that dialectical philosophy attempts to grasp the non-identical via the process of identification. This parallel is only intended at this point in my argument to be suggestive. It is suggestive just because it, first, explicitly posits art as not only a mode of knowledge, but, as in dialectical philosophy, a mode of knowledge of the *non-identical*. Secondly, as was demonstrated above, it is suggestive just because it posits the problematic of this knowledge of the non-identical in the *aesthetic* mode to be, just as in the *philosophical* context, governed by the antagonism between the identifying mode and the non-identical object of comprehension. In each case, Adorno alleges that the solution to this antagonism lies in the 'identification of the non-identical'.

At this point, then, we have established that art is not only a mode of knowledge of truth, which is rationally constituted, but moreover that this truth which is known by art is the non-identical. This clearly provides a strong basis upon which to begin arguing that the truth of philosophy and art can be seen as commensurate. In order to begin building on this basis, I should first like to demonstrate that, as in the case of philosophy, the truth of art is wholly negative and critical. This is best established by re-examining the problematic of delusive mediation in the aesthetic context.

#### **4.4 Artistic Knowledge and Mediation**

As is acknowledged by Adorno's assertion (extracted above (AT: 29)) that the artwork has to 'identify the non-identical' (bearing in mind the pejorative loading which Adorno lends to the concept of 'identity'), art's status as knowledge is not unproblematic. Adorno's positing the artwork as a form of knowledge immediately causes his aesthetic philosophy to re-enter the problematic of delusive mediation explained in sections 2.12 – 2.13. This is so just because art constitutively takes place in experience. This entails the re-introduction of the problem of delusive experience just because, as was explained at length in Chapters 1 and 2, continuous experience *simpliciter* is both made possible by, and determined by, a set of mediating epistemological influences.

The most obvious of these influences is the concept; Adorno takes conceptual mediation to be a condition of the possibility of continuous experience. However, this conceptual mediation of experience is itself determined by the delusive epistemological influences of reification, self-preservation, and thin determination. As a consequence of the unity of the concept with these delusive influences, the experience of the agent is falsified (cf. Chapter 2).

Now, as we know that art constitutively takes place in experience, we can derive two conclusions from Adorno's theory of experiential mediation. First, and importantly, the artwork (as experienced) will make use of, and be constituted by the employment of, concepts. This will become essential for the argument conducted in this Chapter. As a consequence of this conceptuality of aesthetic experience, and the attendant delusive mediation of that aesthetic experience, we can derive the second conclusion that *any knowledge derived from the aesthetic must be negative*. I will now demonstrate why this is the case.

As aesthetic experience is constitutively made possible by virtue of the employment of concepts, and the artwork is perceived by virtue of its interaction with concepts, the artwork cannot, for Adorno, constitute an escape from the problematic of false consciousness. Rather, it is itself, by virtue of taking place in experience, imbricated with these falsifying influences. Like philosophy, then, the artwork cannot provide knowledge in the form of an irrational exit from falsified, rational discourse.

This leaves two possibilities. The artwork can either attempt to provide *positive* knowledge, or it can provide *negative* knowledge. There is, of course, the problem that at this stage it is not apparent how philosophical positivity and negativity would translate into aesthetic positivity and negativity. While the concept of aesthetic negativity will become clearer in the course of this Chapter, as I demonstrate the formal and dialectical nature of the artwork, we can stipulatively define the aesthetically *positive* form of knowledge as any attempt by the artwork to transparently display the true, in such a way that the agent could take himself to have unproblematic, undialectical access to it by virtue of the conventional employment of his concepts. Should the artwork attempt to positively instantiate the true, and thereby provide knowledge, it would be falsified by virtue of its being imbricated in the false epistemological totality. For further explanation of this, please see the section on Adorno's holistic theory of falsity (cf. Section 3.8). So, if the artwork positively instantiates the true, it in fact fails to instantiate the true at all; rather, the true in turn becomes falsified.

As a consequence of this, it is clear that, if the artwork can be seen to be true at all, it must, like philosophy, attempt to present the truth in the midst of and by virtue of

the falsifying mediators of experience and, thereby, be *negative* and *critical*. Just as in our examination of philosophical truth, the artwork cannot present the truth positively, on pain of being falsified by the mediators of experience. So, then, the artwork must, as a form of genuine knowledge of truth, be constituted by a negative critique of those delusive mediators by which it is itself constituted.

While this has, up to this point, been a speculative argument for seeing the artwork's truth as negative, Adorno in fact explicitly endorses this view -

The survival of mimesis, the nonconceptual affinity of the subjectively produced with its unposited other, defines art as a form of knowledge and to that extent as "rational" [...] The aporia of art, pulled between regression to literal magic or surrender of the mimetic impulse to thinglike rationality, dictates its law of motion; the aporia cannot be eliminated [...] Art is rationality that criticizes rationality without withdrawing from it; art is not something prerational or irrational [.] (AT: 70 – 71)

Here, Adorno not only explicitly endorses the negativity of art ('art [...] criticizes rationality') but also, importantly, locates this negativity in the same epistemological context as the negativity of philosophy. We saw in section 3.11 that philosophy was caught in a dilemma. It could not employ the 'discursive', merely rational model of truth, wherein the truth of philosophy would become assimilated by rational, identity thinking, and thereby falsified. However, an irrational escape from this problematic was equally impossible. This lead to philosophy's dialectical nature, as neither merely rational nor irrational.

The above extract finds art in an identical situation. Art is not reducible either to 'magic' (the irrational), nor to 'thinglike rationality'. Like philosophy, art solves this problem through constituting itself as a rational critique of rationality.

This similarity in the negativity of art and philosophy could merely, of course, be skin deep. There is nothing to say that the negativity of philosophy and art relates to the same, identical problematic. Adorno, however, asserts that they do relate to the same problematic –

[A]rt requires philosophy, which interprets it in order to say what it is unable to say, whereas art is only able to say it by not saying it. (AT: 94)

This 'requirement' of philosophy, on the part of art, is so vastly significant as it clearly implies that, if philosophy is to speak for art, it must be *capable* of doing so. Which is to

say, that philosophy and art must share a common truth content which is, as it were, expressible across the two modes of knowledge. If this were the case, the negativity of philosophy and art would constitute two forms of knowledge, both of which serve as differing ways of *knowing the same thing*. And Adorno in fact endorses this reading -

Philosophy and art converge in their truth content: The progressive self-unfolding truth of the artwork is none other than the truth of the philosophical concept. (AT: 172)

This unambiguous assertion from Adorno closes a potential explanatory gap. Art and philosophy are identically placed, epistemologically, in terms of conceptual and delusive mediation. Moreover, both art and philosophy deal with this situation negatively and dialectically. Finally, their truth content is held to be identical. This would appear to put us on a strong footing to claim, and proceed to detail, the unity of the theory of truth for art and philosophy.

#### **4.5 The Specificity of Art**

At this point, then, we have gone a long way towards demonstrating the equivalence between philosophical and aesthetic truth. We have established that both art and philosophy endeavor to negatively instantiate the non-identical through the use of constitutively false, 'identifying' processes. Moreover, we have Adorno's claim that the truth-content of each is identical.

It is at this point, however, that we should pause. The talk of unity between art and philosophy, and Adorno's own description, raises the danger that we are making art and philosophy homogeneous. It may seem as if we are in danger of negating the specificity of the artwork by virtue of collapsing art into philosophy. As such, it is important that some time is dedicated to making clear that, although I am attempting to unify Adorno's *theory of truth* across his philosophy and aesthetics, I still intend to maintain the differentiation between art and philosophy in Adorno's thought in general. The simplest way of demonstrating this differentiation is in examining how art and philosophy each deal with their delusive mediation. Although, as we saw above in section 4.4, both art and philosophy are, for Adorno, subject to the same delusive mediators of experience, it is the different ways in which art and philosophy engage and circumvent this delusive mediation that will best reveal the differentiation which obtains between art and philosophy.

In the case of philosophy, the concepts which mediate its experience also serve to make possible explicitly theoretical discourse. Which is to say, that the concepts

which mediate and make possible philosophical experience are also transparently available for employment in the course of that philosophical experience. As such, philosophy is able to negate its delusive mediation by virtue of an explicitly conceptual, destructively phenomenological practice. The delusive conceptual mediators of experience are ready at hand to be employed in the course of the philosophical text, and thereby an explicit, transparently conceptual critique of the delusive mediation of experience, and the delusive nature of conceptuality, is possible. It is also important to note, as a corollary, that philosophy is transparently concerned with the truth, and conducts itself in order to grasp the truth.<sup>55</sup>

While the artwork is, according to Adorno, also construable as a critique of the delusive nature of conceptuality and the conceptual mediation of experience, it is clear that it cannot comport itself in the same manner as philosophy. This differentiation between the methods in which art and philosophy produce a critique of the delusive mediators of experience and thereby afford access to the non-identical must be maintained in our account for two reasons. First, speaking exegetically, Adorno provides clear textual evidence that he conceives of art's truth as being produced, and as requiring to be interpreted, differently to philosophy. Secondly, leaving Adorno's assertions to one side, there are clear compelling philosophical reasons for taking pains not to merely reduce art's truth to philosophy's truth. These two reasons in fact are mutually constitutive and so are best considered jointly. The relation of the artwork, as Adorno conceives it, to autonomy provides the best way of doing so.

#### **4.6 Art and Autonomy**

The fundamental divorce between philosophy and art which was outlined above concerned the fact that although both philosophy and art instantiate the true through critique of the delusive mediators of experience, philosophy, unlike art, is able to have these same mediating processes appear explicitly in its medium. Put differently, philosophical truth is problematized by the delusive mediation of concepts; however, philosophy is capable of employing and manipulating these self-same concepts in its medium, in order to reveal their falsity. If we are to take Adorno seriously when he claims that art is autonomous (AT: 137), it is clear that art is unable to emulate philosophy's *direct* engagement with its delusive mediators. As Adorno puts it -

The affinity of [aesthetic] construction with cognitive processes, or perhaps rather with their interpretation by the theory of knowledge, is no less

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<sup>55</sup> This assertion made with the usual qualifications, and the usual exceptions in mind.



evident than is their difference, which is that art does not make judgments and when it does, it shatters its own concept. (AT: 74)

Precisely what Adorno means by 'autonomy' is a sticky issue, which will be returned to in the remainder of this Chapter. Presently, it can be taken to mean that the artwork constitutes itself solely by means of aesthetic processes, and solely in relation to what Adorno calls 'aesthetic material' (AT: 201). It is not important (at *this* point) that we elucidate precisely the import of these terms. What is important, however, is to note that this entails that the artwork does not include, nor concern itself with, explicitly epistemological, truth-relevant, materials. On the contrary, it confines itself entirely to the aesthetic, with no explicit dealing with matters of truth. Adorno lends this aspect of the artwork emphasis -

The mimesis of artworks is their resemblance to themselves. Whether univocally or ambiguously, this law is posited by the initial act of each artwork; by virtue of its constitution each work is bound by it [...] By the autonomy of their form, artworks forbid the incorporation of the absolute as if they were symbols [...] Hermetic works do not assert what transcends them as though they were Being occupying an ultimate realm[.] (AT: 137)

This confirms the assertions above; the artwork does not incorporate any explicitly epistemological material. Moreover, it does not constitute itself as a form of knowledge – which is to say, it constitutes itself solely as an artwork, with both its materials and constitutive practices having no intended reference to anything extra-aesthetic (society, concepts, philosophical problems, etc.). The artwork, rather, concerns itself solely with problems of *aesthetic* form and content.

Adorno thematizes this autonomous exclusivity of the artwork, variously terming the artwork 'hermetic' or 'blind' (cf. (AT: 96, 135, 137, 162), (AT: 237, 251) respectively). This serves to throw into relief the impossibility of collapsing the categories of art and philosophy. Rather than being a poetic, or poorly executed, form of philosophy, it would appear that art instead has no relevance whatsoever to the complex of philosophical problems, having only in common the fact that the positive presentation of any truth in art is problematized by the same delusive mediators. The severity of this divorce from the nature of philosophy, however, may seem to have the consequence that Adorno has in fact scuppered his project of seeing the artwork as a form of rational access to the non-identical. While he intends the artwork to be a form of knowledge, which breaks the falsifying compulsion of the concept in order to reach the non-identical (AT:

29), it would seem that his uncompromising insistence on the artwork's being autonomously constituted serves merely to rule this out. If the artwork takes place in experience, and is thus falsified by the mediators of experience, and moreover is *constitutively incapable* of *directly* addressing and critiquing these mediators, it would seem that the artwork is incapable of avoiding being falsified itself. Art's autonomy entails that it excludes, as content, the epistemological processes which falsify it. As it cannot address them (having excluded them), then, it would appear impossible that it could successfully critique them, and escape being falsified by them.

At this point, then, Adorno's laudable refusal to homogenize art and philosophy appears to have undermined any possibility of seeing art as rational knowledge of the true and, by extension, my thesis that artistic and philosophical truth are coeval. However, Adorno flatly denies that the artwork's hermetic status precludes its critical, non-identical instantiating, truth. Rather, he terms the artwork a 'windowless monad' (AT: 6) which, just by virtue of concentrating solely on its aesthetic properties, is able to effect the kind of critique and demolition of its falsifying mediators that is necessary -

That artworks as windowless monads “represent” what they themselves are not can scarcely be understood except in that their own dynamic, their immanent historicity as a dialectic of nature and its domination, not only is of the same essence as the dialectic external to them but resembles it without imitating it. (AT: 6)

In terming the artwork a 'windowless monad', Adorno is here drawing on Leibniz's philosophy for an analogy. For Leibniz, the universe is composed of monads, each of which reflects the others without causally interacting with them (Jolley 2005: 68 - 69). Solely by virtue of developing its own inner principle, each monad nonetheless reflects the entirety of the universe, without causal interaction with any other monad. As the above extract shows, it is this acausal, non-interactive reflection in Leibniz's monadology which is most salient for comprehending Adorno's 'windowless monads'. Without directly dealing with that which is external to the aesthetic (in fact, precluding the extra-aesthetic by virtue of its autonomy), the artwork nonetheless, Adorno claims, 'resembles [...] without imitating' the state of the extra-aesthetic. In this sense, the artwork can be seen as analogous to Leibniz's monads – without causal interaction, the artwork nonetheless expresses the reality of that which is external to it.

The following extract reinforces the curious propensity of the artwork, despite its being 'closed' and 'blind', to reflect and criticize the extra-aesthetic -

Artworks are closed to one another, blind, and yet in their hermeticism they represent what is external. Thus it is, in any case, that they present themselves to tradition as that living autarchy that Goethe was fond of calling entelechy, the synonym for monad [...] As an element of an over-arching context of the spirit of an epoch, entwined with history and society, artworks go beyond their monadic limit even though they lack windows. (AT: 237)

We see both that Adorno posits the artwork as completely autonomous and yet, through this 'blind' autonomy, capable of addressing the extra-aesthetic. This introduces a gap between this autonomy and the extra-aesthetic which we will examine in the following section. This hermetic autonomy gives rise to what Adorno calls the 'shudder' -

Artworks are images as *apparition*, as appearance, and not as a copy. If through the demythologization of the world consciousness freed itself from the ancient shudder, that shudder is permanently reproduced in the historical antagonism of subject and object. The object became as incommensurable to experience, as foreign and frightening, as mana once was. This permeates the image character [of art]. (AT: 110 – 111)

The artwork's enigmaticalness is the shudder, not however in its living presence but as a recollection. (AT: 367)

To summarize the extracts above, then, just by virtue of the hermetic artwork's blind working, the 'windowless monad' of the completed artwork causes an experience in the viewer which Adorno terms the 'shudder'. As we saw in the penultimate extract (2004: 110 - 111), Adorno asserts that this shudder recapitulates an experience which began the history of mankind, against which the history of mankind was opposed. Referring back to the analysis conducted across Chapters 1 and 2, it is clear that this initial experience is itself the non-identical. It is the terror Adorno asserted, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, that mankind incurred when it was first confronted by something incapable of being reduced to or controlled by its categories. This experience, as we saw in Chapter 1, is the experience of the non-identical which initializes the formation of identity thinking.

The import of the above extracts is that Adorno is asserting that, despite the artwork's complete hermeticity and autonomy, the artwork's hermetic process of

constitution nonetheless results in a negating of the delusive mediation with which aesthetic experience is imbricated, and as a consequence serves as an instantiation of the non-identical. This introduces a mystery of some magnitude – how can we take this autonomously aesthetic process to result in a critical break with epistemologically false mediation, resulting in access to the non-identical? In order to understand how Adorno is able to hold that art can be knowledge, and instantiate the non-identical in such a way as to be identical with philosophical truth, while simultaneously constituting itself exclusively aesthetically, we need to re-examine Adorno's assertion that the artwork is hermetically autonomous. If there is some account available which is able to put the hermetic constitution of the artwork in touch with that which is aesthetically heteronomous (epistemology, philosophical and social problematics, etc.), then we may begin to lend plausibility to Adorno's account. As such, the strong differentiation between art and philosophy will not preclude their bearing identical truth contents.

#### **4.7 Autonomy and Heteronomy**

The problem we are currently dealing with, then, is that the artwork's autonomous, 'hermetic' process of constituting itself is, according to Adorno, sufficient to constitute and create a critique of the heteronomous, extra-aesthetic totality. Moreover, this critique, like the philosophical critique, terminates in acquainting the agent with the non-identical. This seems so problematic just because the mediating totality within which the artwork takes place necessarily falsifies that which takes place within it, and prevents any experience of the non-identical. Philosophy was able to circumvent the falsifying mediation of experience by virtue of explicitly addressing and manipulating this mediation. However, if the artwork is wholly hermetic, the engagement, critique and evasion of these delusive mediators would seem impossible, as they do not come into consideration in the artwork's hermetic constitutive processes. In short, there is an apparent explanatory gap between the hermetic constitution of the artwork, and its allegedly socio-historically and philosophically critical, and non-identical instantiating, status.

In order to preserve the possibility of construing art as having truth content, and this truth-content as being concerned with the non-identical, it is imperative that this explanatory gap is closed. To begin closing this explanatory gap, we need to reconsider the relationship between aesthetic autonomy (the artwork's being exclusively formed by aesthetic processes and aesthetic materials) and heteronomy (anything which falls outside the hermetic artwork's remit). This explanatory gap is constituted by the omission of an explanation of how anything which takes place in the realm of aesthetic autonomy could be germane to, or a critique of, that which takes place in the

heteronomic sphere (e.g., philosophy, epistemological concepts, etc.). This explanatory gap is in fact capable of being closed in Adorno's philosophy; as so often, it will be Adorno's theory of mediation which serves to solve the problem. It will allow us to explain how, as Adorno argues we should, we can understand aesthetic autonomy as constituted by heteronomy -

Art and artworks are perishable, not simply because by their heteronomy they are dependent, but because right into the smallest detail of their autonomy [...] they are not only art but something foreign and opposed to it. (AT: 5)

Examining the autonomy of the artwork in Adorno's aesthetics, it is helpful to break down his theory of the autonomy of the artwork into its two main constituents. Adorno conceives the autonomous artwork to be composed of an *autonomous aesthetic process of formation* which concerns itself with wholly autonomous *aesthetic materials*. I will deal with these two elements of aesthetic autonomy in turn, and draw their mediated relationship to heteronomy.

#### **4.8 Aesthetic Process of Formation**

The autonomous aesthetic process of formation, as Adorno understands it, constitutes itself wholly without reference to the artist's intention.<sup>56</sup> While of course the artist likely engages in aesthetic praxis in order to satisfy some given intention, this intention does not (in authentic art) show up in the process of aesthetic formation. Rather, the process of aesthetic formation is confined solely to following the formal demands of the aesthetic materials selected. Adorno asserts that the aesthetic materials employed by the aesthetic process of formation have inherent formal demands; it is the role of the aesthetic process of formation to reconcile these competing formal demands in order to form a completed artwork.

The real source of the risk taken by all artworks, however, is not located in their level of contingency but rather in the fact that each one must follow the whippoorwill of objectivity immanent to it, without any guarantee that the productive forces – the spirit of the artist and his procedures – will be equal to that objectivity. (AT: 48)

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<sup>56</sup> 'Among the sources of error in the contemporary interpretation and critique of artworks the most disastrous is the confusion of the intention, what the artist supposedly wants to say, with the content [*Gehalt*] of the work.' (AT: 197)

Adorno often likens this process of aesthetic formation to the construction of a riddle or *Vexierbild* (most often translated as 'enigma' – 'All artworks – and art altogether – are enigmas; since antiquity this has been an irritation to the theory of art' (AT: 160)).<sup>57</sup> This analogy is informative, just in that a riddle or *Vexierbild* is not constructed according to any pre-established subjective intention, or intended emotive content, but rather is only possible according to the formal properties of its constituents and medium (the visual for the *Vexierbild*, the linguistic for the riddle). The finished product is the outcome of a dialectic between the formal properties of each of its constituents, and could not have been imposed onto these constituents. (Taking the *Vexierbild* for an example – the concealed image cannot be imposed on the apparent image, but rather must be composed from the formal properties of the constituents of the apparent image. Failing to do so will cause the concealed image to no longer be concealed, and the constitutive ambiguity of the *Vexierbild* will be lost). So, Adorno's thematic use of riddles and *Vexierbilder* in relation to art is informative. In these cases, the resultant meaning could not be pre-established, nor could it be imposed on the constitutive materials. Rather, the nature and formal content of these materials plays a dialectically important determining role in establishing what the completed artefact will be, and what it will 'mean'. This, then, is how we should understand the process of aesthetic creation – it does not concern itself with propounding an ideology, nor attempt to instantiate an 'aesthetic idea', but is instead a formal process of investigating aesthetic materials, and then resolving the various aesthetic and formal properties of these aesthetic materials such that an aesthetic whole results.<sup>58</sup>

We can see that the process of aesthetic formation is removed from subjective impulse, desire, and belief, and instead becomes a process of following and resolving the formal properties of its aesthetic materials.<sup>59</sup> We can now clearly see the

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<sup>57</sup> The *Vexierbild*, or picture puzzle, is an illustration which plays on the formal characteristics of its components in order to introduce a number of different possible images, often satirical in intent. Examples of these abound, but the most common are likely Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit, and a great deal of Dali's work (e.g. *The Great Paranoiac*).

<sup>58</sup> Of course, this process of attempting to form a unified aesthetic whole is not necessarily completable. In fact, Adorno holds that the seamless aesthetic whole has been rendered impossible by socio-historical developments. Therefore, any 'authentic' attempt at aesthetic unity will necessarily fail, and display its failure in its incapability to form a seamless whole – 'As little as art is to be defined by any other element, it is simply identical with form. Every other element can be negated in the concept of form, even aesthetic unity, the idea of form that first made the wholeness and autonomy of the artwork possible. In highly developed modern works, form tends to dissociate unity, either in the interest of expression or to criticize art's affirmative character.' (AT: 186)

<sup>59</sup> 'Rather, the lyric poet's *désinvolture*, his dispensation from the strictures of logic – which enter his sphere only as shadows – grants him the possibility of following the immanent lawfulness of his works.' (AT: 72).

justification for Adorno's terming the artwork 'hermetic'. The artwork's constituting principle is nothing other than the treatment of the properties of aesthetic materials without reference to anything but their formal properties. As such, the artwork is entirely autonomous *considered from the perspective of its constitutive processes*.

However, considered dialectically, these constitutive processes, which operate autonomously, are in fact constituted by heteronomy. It is in understanding autonomy's constitution by heteronomy that we will be able to de-problematize the relationship between the blind, hermetic artwork and socio-historically sensitive, philosophical truth. It will do so by giving us a method of comprehending how the artwork's genuinely autonomous (which is to say, completely unconcerned with any extra-aesthetic existent) process of constitution and selection of materials entails a truth which is not *merely* aesthetic, but also socio-historically critical.

Adorno has frequent reference to the mutual constitution of aesthetic-process autonomy and heteronomy, frequently referring to this as the 'guilt' of the artwork -

The monadological character of artworks would not have formed without the guilt of the monstrous monadological character of society, but only by its means do artworks achieve that objectivity that transcends solipsism.  
(AT: 389)

Adorno's use of term monad is somewhat confusing here – it does not seem that Adorno means to signify the acausal reflective properties of Leibniz's monads we explored above in section 4.6. Rather, here the 'monadological character' shared by the artwork and society would appear to refer to the self-contained nature of Leibniz's monads. Leibniz's monads have no parts, and each is a complete unity (i.e., it is not differentiated, but bears its properties uniformly throughout itself) (Jolley 2005: 66 - 67). This seems to be what Adorno has in mind when he calls society 'monstrous[ly] monadological', as this would map onto Adorno's critique of society as a 'total society, which encompasses all relationships and impulses' (DE: 29). Society's monadological character would then be its reduction of all of its constituent elements to its own standard, its elimination of differentiation in favour of total unity. Similarly, art also dominates its elements and forces them into a single unified whole (AT: 369) .

The 'guilt' of art's autonomy mentioned here is best construed sociologically. Here the 'guilt' of art is identified with its employment of the 'means' of the monadological character of society; the artwork removes itself completely from its milieu, and makes no attempt to manipulate or engage with things as they are. While this withdrawal is necessary for the correct execution of the artwork's constitutive,

autonomous processes, it is nonetheless guilty as this withdrawal furthers the cause of that milieu, which is inhumane.

Art becomes entangled in the guilt context of the living, not only because its distance allows the guilt context to prevail but even more importantly because it makes incisions in the living in order to help it to language and thus mutilates it. (AT: 190)

This second extract reinforces this line of thought by identifying the guilt of the artwork with its 'distance'. In censuring the artwork for its 'distance', Adorno clearly supports my interpretation above. The economic and social realities of artistic praxis, and the artwork's inner autonomy, necessitate a culpable compromise with an inhumane state of affairs. The second half of this extract, however is less clear. Here 'guilt' appears to be identified with an epistemological trait – the 'mutilation' which the artwork causes in 'bringing the living to language'. This guilty mutilation through language seems clearly to shift the sense of 'guilt' with which we are dealing. This second type of guilt is not (merely) sociological, but epistemological. The artwork would seem to incur this guilt through an inevitable falsification introduced by its medium of expression. This inevitable falsification of 'language' is a clear reference to the problematic of identity thinking.

As we saw in the analyses of the above extracts, this 'guilt' of the artwork would appear to be polysemic. The guilt is doubly constituted by the artwork's heteronomic social standing, and due to its partaking in 'identity thinking'.<sup>60</sup> I will address these in turn.

The first form of 'guilt', that of the artwork's imbrication in a falsely constituted social whole, is relatively simple. Adorno claims that, although the artwork constitutes itself as autonomous, this 'autonomous' activity is predicated on a heteronomous state of affairs. This heteronomous state of affairs is nothing other than the unequal social distribution of funds which makes possible the artist's hermetic, blind activity. To sharpen the issue, the 'hermetic' nature of the artwork entails that the artist must construct the artwork without reference to immediate interest, ideology, or instrumental goal. This, however, is only possible if the artist's situation is such that he is able to

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<sup>60</sup> There is a further guilt of the artwork, not strictly relevant at this juncture. This would be the artwork's 'feign[ing] the factual existence of reconciliation' (AT: 177). The artwork is unavoidably ideological, and hence guilty, as the vision of utopia afforded by its critical nature redounds to the good reputation of the false world which made that artwork possible. 'That is the melancholy of art. It achieves an unreal reconciliation at the price of real reconciliation.' (AT: 68).



withdraw himself from these concerns; and this possibility itself is determined either directly by the social structure (in the case of state funding), or indirectly (in the case of patronage or personal wealth, either of which are only possible in a society which unevenly distributes its funds). There is an inescapable air of the mundane about this line of thought. However, there is something to be said for it. Namely, that this represents an attempt by Adorno to demonstrate that even at the most basic aesthetic level (the existence of the artist, and the artist's engaging the activity of creating art) autonomy in fact presupposes heteronomy. Adorno's understanding is that the nature of autonomous aesthetic production (the hermetic working of aesthetic material) is itself only possible if certain heteronomous conditions obtain (the artist's social standing, level of funds, etc.). So, at this basic level, Adorno attempts to demonstrate the constitution of autonomous aesthetic activity by the heteronomous.

Adorno's second line of thought, that the autonomy of aesthetic processes is constituted by heteronomy by virtue of taking part in identity thinking, is far more significant. Adorno claims that heteronomy is constitutive of the autonomous aesthetic processes. This constitution of the autonomous by the heteronomous lies in the artwork's 'domination' (AT: 370) of its aesthetic materials. Adorno asserts both that the artwork is inherently 'dominating' and that this domination itself serves to heteronomize the artwork by making it dependent on the identity thinking of which this aesthetic domination is an offshoot. To make good sense of this, however, we need to be absolutely clear about what Adorno means by 'domination'.

It is tempting to read the artwork's domination as the artwork's attempt to force its aesthetic materials into a pre-established aesthetic form. On this reading, then, domination would arise whenever the formal properties of the aesthetic materials were ignored in order to subordinate them to some imposed formal project. However, this reading is untenable, just because Adorno also identifies this domination of the artwork as being present in ideal, 'authentic' artworks.<sup>61</sup> As he identifies the artwork's optimality or authenticity with its refusal to impose pre-established forms, it is apparent that the domination referred to cannot be of this type.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, rather than a contingent property of art, Adorno takes this domination to be intrinsic, and thus present in both authentic and inauthentic art. Adorno makes clear what he intends by 'domination' in the following –

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<sup>61</sup> 'The opposition of artworks to domination is mimesis of domination. They must assimilate themselves to the comportment of domination in order to produce something qualitatively distinct from the world of domination.' (AT: 370)

<sup>62</sup> 'The work is no longer to be the result of any pregiven form; flourishes, ornament, and all residual elements of an overarching formal character are to be renounced: The artwork is to be organized from below.' (AT: 142).

The opposition of artworks to domination is mimesis of domination. They must assimilate themselves to the comportment of domination in order to produce something qualitatively distinct from the world of domination [...] aesthetic rationality wants to make good on the damage done by nature-dominating rationality. (AT: 370)

What art in the broadest sense works with, it oppresses: This is the ritual of the domination of nature that lives on in play. (AT: 65)

No matter how much spirit may exert domination in art, its objectivation frees it from the aims of domination. (AT: 148)

Undoubtedly, the historical [aesthetic] materials and their domination – technique – advance; discoveries such as those of perspective in painting and polyphony in music are the most obvious examples. (AT: 276)

We see, then, that the dominating aspect of the artwork consists in the artwork's submitting the sensuous, apparent properties of the aesthetic materials to the 'spiritual' (i.e., intellectual) design of the aesthetic whole. This sacrifice of each of the immanent demands of each of the aesthetic materials to the overarching, formal whole, unavoidably transforms, mutilates and reduces the aesthetic materials involved. Characteristically, then, the forming processes of the artwork reduce and ignore the full complexity of the materials it deals with in order to facilitate the project of creating an aesthetic whole. The aesthetic materials are 'oppressed' by the strictures of the artwork's technique in order to produce the artwork.

As such, the artwork constitutively recapitulates the characteristic error and 'guilt' of identity thinking, which does violence to the topic of its thought in order to attain the pragmatic goal of that thought. This similarity between the forming process of artworks and of the epistemological processes of identity thinking is not intended to be merely analogical. Rather, Adorno has a developed account of the emergence of art from, and imbrication of art with, identity thinking. In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno repeatedly locates the artwork as a constituent part of the dialectic of enlightenment sharing, along with instrumental reason, a rejection of magic and an attempt to control and identify its material. There is not space to enter into this in detail, but the following should serve to illustrate Adorno's line of thought -

Art holds true to the shudder, but not by regression to it. Rather, art is its legacy. The spirit of the artworks produces the shudder by externalizing it in objects. Thus art participates in the actual movement of history in accord with the law of enlightenment[.] (AT: 157)

How does this constitute a violation of the artwork's autonomy? Well, firstly, you will note that Adorno's genealogy in the extract above of artistic practice posits that practice as dependent on, and an offshoot of, identity thinking. It is an element of the 'movement of history' presently ruled by the 'law of enlightenment'. You will recall from Chapters 1 and 2 that this law of enlightenment ('identity thinking') is not necessary *simpliciter*, but rather necessary given the currently obtaining socio-historical conditions. As such, the constitution of the artwork is not autonomous *simpliciter*, but rather only autonomous so long as certain heteronomous conditions (i.e., the prevalence of identity thinking) obtain.

This however is less important than the second way in which the extract makes clear the relationship between autonomy and heteronomy. In the above extract, Adorno does not posit art as exempt from the 'enlightenment' (i.e., identity thinking) character of human thought hitherto, or *merely* critical of it, but in fact fully imbricated with it. Just as we saw in the case of philosophy, art is itself constitutively subject to the determination and character of enlightenment thought. As such, art is immanently constituted by identity thinking; its processes are a species of identity thinking.

As art is itself a species of identity thinking, it therefore constitutively comports itself in the same manner as other forms of identity thinking (this is shown in the artwork's 'dominating' its material (AT: 65), just as concepts dominate their objects). As such, there is a pre-established harmony between the way in which aesthetic processes and conceptual processes operate. Both will conduct themselves according to the constitutive tendencies of 'enlightenment' thinking. As such, we have the first example of the artwork's autonomy (following the immanent demands of its own constitutive processes) being reflective of (without causal interaction with) the extra-aesthetic.

We have seen, then, that aesthetic processes, while behaving wholly autonomously, are nonetheless only possible should given heteronomous conditions obtain. Moreover, these autonomous aesthetic processes, by virtue of being species of enlightenment thought, are predetermined to be congruous with non-aesthetic cognitive processes, such as obtain in philosophy and conceptual thought. This determination of the autonomous by the heteronomous serves to begin making clear how the hermetic, 'blind' working of the artwork, and the resultant autonomous aesthetic truth, can

amount to a philosophically critical, negative instantiation of the non-identical. Our examination of the relationship between the aesthetic processes and identity thinking demonstrates this, in beginning to make apparent the continuity between the hermetic status of the artwork and the obtaining socio-epistemological whole. While these aesthetic processes do not *intentionally* form a critique of the obtaining epistemology of identity thinking, and do not in fact concern themselves with that epistemology, we can see that in fact the aesthetic process is constituted and determined by that epistemic whole. As such, the artwork's aesthetic processes recapitulate the nature of the processes of the epistemological whole. Both the epistemological and aesthetic processes are identical in terms of their constitutive treatment of the material they work – they are both species of identity thinking.

This lays the foundation for understanding the relationship between the artwork's hermetic status and that artwork's being (despite its hermetic status) an epistemological critique, a form of knowledge, and an instantiation of the non-identical. We should understand the aesthetic processes as an *oblique reflection* of the epistemological whole. This reflection is *oblique* just because the epistemological totality asserts itself in the aesthetic, just as it does in the conceptual mediation of experience and in philosophy, but does so without being itself instantiated in those processes (the artwork does not *explicitly* reflect the epistemological whole in its expressed themes – rather, the determination is conceptual and oblique). Rather, the aesthetic processes remain autonomous (i.e., do not for-themselves consider anything extra-aesthetic) but, due to their autonomy's being constituted by heteronomy come, *through autonomous activity* to recapitulate the heteronomous epistemological totality. This reconfirms the usefulness of Adorno's analogy of the 'windowless monad'; like Leibniz's monad, the artwork reflects what is outside itself, without bearing any explicit relationship to that outside. This examination, then, of the relationship between autonomy and heteronomy in the context of the constitutive processes of the artwork has already begun to make clear how we can close the gap between the autonomy of the artwork, the artwork's truth, and that truth's socio-critical, non-identical instantiating nature. Looking at the relationship between autonomy and heteronomy in the context of aesthetic materials will serve to finally close this gap.

#### **4.9 Aesthetic Materials and the Autonomy of Selection**

Our examination of aesthetic materials must be split into two distinct parts. We should understand the autonomy of aesthetic materials as having a two-fold character – autonomy of *selection* and autonomy of *function*. This section will briefly go over the autonomy of selection; the following section will be dedicated to explaining the far more

significant autonomy of function.

We turn first, then, to the autonomy of 'selection' as regards aesthetic materials. The autonomy of selection consists in the artwork's having complete control over those materials it chooses to employ.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, this expansion of control is accompanied by a distaste for any 'immediate', sensuous material. This particular form of autonomy in the artwork is conceived by Adorno as developing over time. He often refers to this as the artwork's ongoing 'spiritualization' -

Spiritualization [...] the continuous expansion of the mimetic taboo on art [...] The sensuously pleasing has come under [...] attack. On the one hand, through the artwork's spiritualization the external must pass by way of spirit and has increasingly become the appearance of the inward. (AT: 120 – 121)

As the artwork's constitutive processes develops over time, they cease to be content with pre-given formal material (as in, for example, pre-determined features of 'genre' fiction) and increasingly determine for themselves that which is fit to be an aesthetic material. This tendency expresses itself in a twofold way. First, it is expressed in the *free* selection of aesthetic materials without dictation from pre-established forms. This amounts to an expansion of the freedom of the principle of selection. Secondly, it is expressed in the new tendency of the artwork to incorporate previously given *formal* elements of the artworks as *content* (as in modernism's play with previously constitutive features of given genres, and collage's recontextualization of other artworks into material for the creation of a new artwork). This latter expression of the spiritualization of the artwork amounts to an expansion of that which is there to be selected.

The heteronomy of this selection of aesthetic materials is closely related to the heteronomy of aesthetic processes identified in the previous section. The ongoing process of the autonomization of aesthetic material selection is understood by Adorno as part of the artwork's ongoing spiritualization. This spiritualization is not confined to the aesthetic, but in fact a part of the ongoing dialectic of enlightenment -

Thus, as Hegel was the first to perceive, the spirit of artworks is integrated into an overarching process of spiritualization: that of the progress of consciousness. (AT: 120)

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<sup>63</sup> As such, it is ambiguous between being an autonomous aesthetic process, or a form of autonomy better associated with the aesthetic material.

While spiritualization, then, is a process of the increasing autonomization of the artwork's control over the selection of its materials, it remains heteronomously determined nonetheless. As the process of spiritualization is predicated upon and made possible by 'the progress of consciousness' (itself determined by identity thinking, and the ongoing intensification of identity thinking in the dialectic of enlightenment), the artwork's autonomy of selection as expressed in the artwork's spiritualization is in fact dependent on the heteronomous. As we found in the relation of aesthetic processes to identity thinking, the autonomy of selection is in fact heteronomous as it is made possible by extra-aesthetic epistemological processes. The autonomy of aesthetic material selection, then, bears the same 'guilt' of the aesthetic processes that we saw in the previous section, and similarly reinforces the deep tie between the autonomous aesthetic processes and the contingent epistemological whole which makes them possible. As such, it also reinforces the artwork's status as an oblique reflection of the epistemological whole.

The examination of aesthetic processes, and the autonomy of selection with regards to aesthetic material, has served to lay the foundation for an account which can close the explanatory gap between autonomous art and the truth of art's being inherently concerned with the extra-aesthetic. We have seen that the artwork's entirely autonomous procedures will, due to their heteronomous constitution, entail that the artwork's broad nature will be akin to identity thinking, by virtue of the dominating nature of its treatment of its material. At this point, however, this is far from sufficient; all we have established is that the methodology of art and critical philosophy is similar. At this point, then, the artwork is still entirely hermetic in our account, without reference to the extra-aesthetic. We have merely established that that which takes place in the interior of the artwork is methodologically akin to that which takes place in identity thinking. However, the materials of the artwork and of epistemology remain completely separate, and we are left with no way of understanding the relation of the former to the latter. If we are to see art as bearing an epistemologically significant truth (the access to the non-identical), we still require an explanation of how the blind, hermetic nature of the artwork and aesthetic material can refer outside of itself. This will be achieved in the following section, in an investigation of the autonomy of function of aesthetic materials. This will finally close the explanatory gap between the hermetic nature and the non-identical instantiating, critical nature of the artwork.

#### **4.10 Aesthetic Materials and Autonomy of Function**

Understanding the precise relationship between the autonomy of aesthetic material's function and the heteronomy of that function is the most important part of this final

Chapter. We have already established that aesthetic processes are obliquely reflective of the epistemological totality. If we can establish that aesthetic materials are themselves obliquely reflective of epistemological materials, then we will be able to show that the artwork is truly a form of knowledge directly equivalent to the philosophical, and thus that its form of truth should be assimilable to philosophy's.

I will first explain the autonomy of aesthetic function. We have established that the artwork is, for Adorno, a formal process of formation in which the aesthetic processes follow the aesthetic properties of the selected aesthetic materials. Adorno posits the function of these aesthetic materials as not in fact reducible to their sensuous or emotive properties (AT: 120 - 121). They are not employed due to a contingent liking for their sensuous properties (i.e., timbre, hue, or assonance), nor due to their conformity to a pre-established intention to instantiate a given emotional or political truth. Rather, these aesthetic materials present to the artist a set of demands. Aesthetic materials, then, are always already a form of aesthetic logic, imposing their own formal demands, and having their own set of aesthetico-logical possibilities (i.e., that which they can and cannot be combined with, and so on). I stipulate 'aesthetico-logical' to refer to the formal properties of aesthetic materials, as they determine the process of aesthetic formation. An example of the aesthetico-logical property of an aesthetic material *x* would be its employment entailing the impossibility of the employment of *y*, or, more plausibly, its employment opening up a large set of possibilities, and simultaneously closing off some other set. Although, as will be shown, these aesthetico-logical properties are socio-historically determined, an informative analogy might be harmonic relations in music. If one is committed to avoiding dissonance, the employment of a given note immediately excludes a large set of notes from being employed after it, as it stands in a relation of dissonance with these notes. This is an aesthetico-logical relation. However, relationships of assonance and dissonance are largely 'natural' – aesthetico-logical properties for Adorno are not natural properties, as will be shown.

As aesthetic materials are possessed of their own aesthetic logic, it is the artist's role to follow and reconcile these formal demands -

[O]pinion generally produces opinionated artworks that are, in a certain sense, rationalistic. Rather, the lyric poet's *desinvolture*, his dispensation from the strictures of logic – which enter his sphere only as shadows – grants him the possibility of following the immanent lawfulness of his works. (AT: 72)

The first 'logic' referred to in the above extract refers not to aesthetico-logic, but rather formal logic. It is the 'immanent lawfulness' of the work which represents what I call aesthetico-logical properties. 'Opinionated' artworks are not successful precisely because they lack the passivity, the *desinvolture* of the artist which allows him to follow the 'immanent lawfulness' of the aesthetic material. It is the 'consistency of [... the artwork's] elaboration' (AT: 170) of these aesthetic materials which entails the truth of the artwork, rather than anything over and above the formal / aesthetico-logical constitution of the aesthetic materials -

[A]esthetic form is the objective organization within each artwork of what appears as bindingly eloquent. It is the nonviolent synthesis of the diffuse that nevertheless preserves it as what it is in its divergences and contradictions, and for this reason form is actually an unfolding of truth. (AT: 189)

Aesthetic materials present themselves to the aesthetic processes not as non-aesthetic content to be subordinated to the formal demands of aesthetic processes. (Which is to say, aesthetic materials are never, for Adorno, heteronomous material which must be forcibly aestheticized). Rather, aesthetic materials are always already sets of aesthetico-logical demands, which it is the artist's role to formally reconcile and reconfigure, in order to attain a true artwork.

It is difficult to comprehend what these purely aesthetico-logical properties of aesthetic materials could amount to for Adorno. Once introduced into the nexus of the artwork, the aesthetic materials appear to be re-translated out of their sensuous and affective properties, and to become instead purely formal, in this aesthetico-logical sense.<sup>64</sup> These non-sensuous, logical properties of aesthetic materials I will refer to as 'valencies'. In chemistry, a valency refers to a given atom's propensity to combine (or fail to combine) with other atoms. This valency, then, determines the atom's possible behaviour when taken in combination with other atoms. It would appear helpful to apply this concept analogously to aesthetic materials in the context of the artwork.

Aesthetic materials, according to Adorno, possess what I have termed aesthetico-logical properties, strictly separate from pre-established forms, the artist's liking, their affective properties, etc., which dictate the possible combinations which can

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<sup>64</sup> I do not have time to enter into this, but I should like to note that this explains Adorno's assertion that form and content are not separable or unified, but rather dialectically interrelated (AT: 194). The formal properties of aesthetic materials, and hence the resultant artwork, are nothing but the content of the aesthetic materials, appearing as form in the aesthetic nexus.



result in their employment in an artwork. Moreover, Adorno asserts that optimal aesthetic formation consists in nothing over the artist's noting and reconciling these aesthetico-logical properties of the aesthetic materials. It is just the aesthetic materials' possession of a valency, a kind of property of aesthetic logic completely divorced from the material's apparent properties outside of the logic of aesthetic formation, which constitutes its autonomy. While it is difficult to cash out further what these aesthetico-logical properties are, one can appeal to the phenomenology of artistic creation for support. Anyone who has engaged in creative activity will be familiar with the experience of the 'flow' of creation; the experience of each creative action recommending, out of itself, some further elaboration of the artwork being constructed. This obscure sensation of the aesthetic material's recommending certain decisions, and precluding others, may be taken as an experience of the aesthetico-logical properties of aesthetic materials.

By virtue of being present to the aesthetic processes merely as aesthetico-logical valencies, the aesthetic materials retain their autonomy. The aesthetic materials are 'blind' in precisely the same fashion as the aesthetic processes, by virtue of presenting themselves merely as aesthetico-logical properties assimilable by the aesthetic logic of those processes. The aesthetic materials are blind, and ensure the blindness of the aesthetic processes, in that they present themselves to the aesthetic processes without any reference to or relevance to anything outside of the aesthetic nexus. Rather, they are present solely as aesthetic valencies which must be dominated by the aesthetic processes, such that they can be forced into a state of dialectical tension with a constellation of other aesthetic materials (AT: 189). This constitutes the autonomy of function of aesthetic materials – their function in the process of aesthetic construction is explicable purely in terms of aesthetic logic, and hence purely autonomous.

Understanding the heteronomy of the function of these aesthetic materials requires a new approach. The heteronomy of all of the previous forms of aesthetic autonomy were explicable by understanding their autonomy as being an off-shoot from (and contingent on) extra-aesthetic heteronomous epistemological processes. In this case, however, this will not work. Aesthetic materials are the *subject matter* of the aesthetic processes, with which those processes are confronted. Rather, what is required is a method of positing the valencies of the aesthetic materials as determined by the extra-aesthetic totality. That these valencies are in fact determined by extra-aesthetic content is not in doubt -

The artwork is mediated to real history by its monadological nucleus.

History is the content of artworks. To analyze artworks means no less than to become conscious of the history immanently sedimented in them. (AT: 112)

[Aesthetic m]aterials and objects are as historically and socially preformed as are their methods; they are definitively transformed by what transpires in the works. (AT: 117)

While the above provides evidence that Adorno understands that which takes place in the interior of the artwork to be determined by that which is exterior, Adorno does not directly provide an explanation of how these aesthetic materials are themselves able to reinstate, and thus be reflective of, obtaining sociohistorical-epistemological contradictions. This leads to the problem which Dahlhaus identifies with Adorno's aesthetic theory. As the autonomy of the artwork is apparently absolute, there would appear to be no way to relate what takes place in the artwork to what inheres outside of the artwork –

Adorno not infrequently displays a penchant for aphoristic allusions to socio-musical parallels and analogies, allusions which are by no means intended to be taken playfully, but the logical status of which is difficult to perceive or even questionable. (Dahlhaus 1987: 243, cited in Paddison 2002: 210)

[T]he contrast between [...] the formal-analytically individualizing and the sociological generalizing procedure [...] returns as a flaw in the individual analyses, though Adorno was able at times, by dint of great effort, to reconcile the opposing views by force. And the verbal analogies perform the function of hiding a gap which the arguments could not close. (Dahlhaus 1987: 244, cited in Paddison 2002: 223)

In identifying this problem, Dahlhaus is treating the same problem which has been exercising us in the present Chapter. Namely, the problem of relating the autonomous formation and analysis of the autonomous artwork to that which is extra-aesthetic. As Paddison notes in the paper in which Dahlhaus' challenge is cited, this problem can only be closed by consideration of the dialectical nature of aesthetic material -

Adorno argues that while aesthetics must immerse itself in the particularity

of individual works through analysis[...] it is nevertheless a different kind of activity to analysis. [...] [The] aim of such an analysis is to establish the technical *consistency* (*Stimmigkeit*) of a work. [...] [Access to the truth content of the artwork requires not only analysis, but second reflection] in terms of the relations between the work and its social and historical context – *a context which also constitutes, if I understand Adorno correctly, the work's structure, as socially and historically mediated content (Gehalt)* [...] It is the “correspondence” between the inner structural relations of the work and the outer social relations within which it functions which is the focus of Adorno's interpretative method, and which is, of course, the bone of contention [for writers like Dahlhaus]. (Paddison 2002: 222 – 223, emphasis mine)

In his monograph *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, Paddison enters into this problem at length, giving an extended treatment of Adorno's theory of mediation, and its operation in the aesthetic context. Paddison notes that the structural properties and contradictions of aesthetic materials are themselves the products of social antagonisms -

At the level of the aesthetic, sublimated/repressed social antagonisms and internalized socio-cultural norms (including the process of rationalization itself) are displaced into the arena of the artistic material. The stage on which the conflict now plays itself out is the *structure* of the work of art, in the tension between mimesis and rationality, expression and construction, as the *immanent dialectic of the material*. (Paddison 1993: 147, emphasis mine)

As such, Paddison is alleging that the aesthetic function of aesthetic materials is constituted by the extra-aesthetic; that the autonomy of function is in fact determined by heteronomy. This reflection which obtains between the aesthetic materials and the extra-aesthetic is, Paddison alleges, constituted by 'mimesis'.<sup>65</sup> 'Mimesis', in the context

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<sup>65</sup> To be exact, it is the conflict between mimesis and rationality which Paddison introduces. However, as demonstrated by their respective association with expression and construction, it is mimesis which serves to open the artwork to the extra-aesthetic, whereas rationality (as expressed in construction and aesthetic technology) serves to motor the ongoing, autonomous development of aesthetic processes. There is a deeper sense in which the two poles mediate one another (that the processes of rationality are crystallized productions of mimesis, and that mimesis is only possible by means of these rational crystallizations, cf. (Paddison 1993: 146)). However, for the purposes of this analysis, I will treat mimesis and

of Adorno's philosophical writings, denotes the propensity of thought to try and assimilate itself to the world in order to comprehend it.<sup>66</sup> It is clear that we cannot interpret aesthetic mimesis along these lines, just due to the hermeticity of the artwork already outlined.<sup>67</sup> It is clear that Paddison himself does not understand the operation of aesthetic mimesis in this way. Paddison asserts that, for example -

Social antagonisms exist within the art work only in 'cipher' form, as deviations from the handed-down formal norms, as genres, formal types and schemata' (Paddison 1993: 147)

Here, Paddison is arguing that the artwork's mimesis is not constituted by a mimetic introjection of social contradictions and the extra-aesthetic as *content*, but in fact the mimesis of the artwork is a *formal* occurrence taking place at the level of the artwork's structure.<sup>68</sup> As such, it would appear that the 'mimesis' which Paddison refers to is equivalent to what I have earlier referred to as 'oblique reflection'. Put into the idiom employed in this Chapter, Paddison holds that the valencies of the aesthetic materials reflect extra-aesthetic contradictions. As such, the 'mimesis' of the artwork is an oblique reflection, obtaining between the autonomously blind and the heteronomous. Adorno himself endorses this reading of mimesis -

The survival of mimesis, the nonconceptual affinity of the subjectively produced with its unposited other, defines art as a form of knowledge and to that extent as 'rational' (AT: 70)

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rationality as separable, with the implicit caveat that, despite being distinct, they are ultimately moments in a dialectical whole.

<sup>66</sup> 'The cave drawings are stages of a process and in no way an early one. The first images must have been preceded by a mimetic comportment – the assimilation of the self to its other.' (AT: 416).

<sup>67</sup> There is also a more developed defense of this position on aesthetic mimesis, which I cannot give here for reasons of space. In short, it would appear that interpreting mimesis as being the artwork's intentional, as it were, attempt to make itself like the world would result in a violation of the artwork's autonomy, as well as the impossibility of aesthetic construction. The artwork would become a melange of mimetically imported social content and autonomous aesthetic content – this would be in clear violation of Adorno's claim that nothing can appear in the artwork without first being reduced to the artwork's own categories. ('Object in art and object in empirical reality are entirely distinct. In art the object is the work produced by art, as much containing elements of empirical reality as displacing, dissolving, and reconstructing them according to the work's own law. Only through such transformation [...] does art give empirical reality its due.' (AT: 335)). This self-same reduction to the artwork's own autonomous categories prevents the appearance in the artwork of any mimetically imported content. One cannot read mimesis in this way, then, as it does not cohere with Adorno's theory of the artwork.

<sup>68</sup> 'It is the sociohistorical content of the work mediated through its form which Adorno identifies, as far as one can understand him here, as the truth content of the work, and which is thus the *telos* of his hermeneutics.' (Paddison 2002: 223)

Adorno is here making clear that mimesis is not constituted by an intentional attempt by the artist to make himself, or his artwork, like the world. Rather, mimesis describes an unintentional 'affinity [for] its *unposited* other' (emphasis mine). As such, art's mimesis entails nothing other than its oblique reflection of its other; the artwork, without positing or intending any reference to the extra-aesthetic, nonetheless reflects it. But how do we understand this oblique reflection? Paddison puts us on the right track by pointing towards the operation of mediation -

It means that the second reflection of sociological critique and philosophical interpretation, which Adorno argues is both separate from and, at the same time, dependent upon the first reflection of immanent analysis, has its model *within* the process of mediation which constitutes the technical structure of the work itself. (Paddison 2002: 224)

Paddison is undoubtedly correct on this score. Mediation is the only remaining available method of understanding the autonomous aesthetic function of aesthetic materials as heteronomously constituted. As we saw in Chapter 3, one of the unique properties of mediation is that it influences that which is mediated without showing up in that which is mediated. As such, it provides a method of seeing the autonomy of aesthetic materials as determined, without thereby compromising the autonomous nature of their operation in the artwork. Mediation allows us to see them as determined, without this extra-aesthetic determination showing up in the course of the employment of the aesthetic processes and hence compromising the hermeticity of the artwork. If we are able to reapply our analysis of the mediation of experience to aesthetic materials, I believe we will be able to form an account of the heteronomy of the autonomy of aesthetic function.

We know from Chapter 3 that any experience, with the exception of the experience of the non-identical, is determined by the following three influences – reification, thin determination, and self-preservation. As aesthetic materials and processes are wholly hermetic and insular, these three mediating influences which make experience possible appear our best hope of achieving a coherent theory of the mediation of autonomous aesthetic material function.

The combination of reification and self-preservation, in enforcing the tendency of identity thinking to take its concepts of things to exhaust those things, is clearly at issue in the aesthetic. We have already seen this in our examination of the heteronomy of the aesthetic processes. While these mediating influences are germane in the case

of the aesthetic processes, however, they do not appear to be relevant when considering aesthetic materials. As already noted, the aesthetic materials are the *subject* of these epistemological processes. As such, these forms of mediation are unable to effect an oblique reflection between aesthetic *materials* and the extra-aesthetic.

It is thin determination, then, which we should see as making possible the oblique reflection which obtains between aesthetic materials and the extra-aesthetic. We have already seen, in Chapters 2 and 3, that thin determination entails that the apparent properties of any subject of experience are in fact determined by the social totality. Moreover, this thin determination is, due to reification, not transparent to immediate experience. As such, the presented properties of objects in experience are in fact mediated productions of thin determination.

Having established in Chapters 2 and 3 that thin determination is a property of all experience *simpliciter*, it is in fact a short step to comprehending how it is that the autonomy of aesthetic function is obliquely reflective of the social totality. Aesthetic materials are constitutively experiential, both in the course of their employment in the construction of the artwork, as well as in their role in the subject's experience of the completed artwork. This being the case, we have a straightforward legitimation for Adorno's claim, and Paddison's reading of Adorno, that the artwork's structure, which it effects through the reconciliation of aesthetic material's valencies, comes to be obliquely reflective of the social totality.

We can see from the existence of thin determination that the autonomous valencies which aesthetic materials bear in the artwork must, qua an object of experience, be determined by thin determination. As such, these valencies must be obliquely reflective of the source of this thin determination – i.e., the social totality. As such, the formal problematic of aesthetic materials, and the resultant form of the completed artwork, are obliquely reflective of the extra-aesthetic. The autonomy of the valencies presented by the aesthetic materials to the aesthetic processes is in fact determined by the heteronomy of the social totality. As such, the aesthetic contradictions, tensions, and incompatibilities which the aesthetic processes encounter in the course of the autonomic process of constructing the artwork are in fact determined by and reflective of the totality, which mediates and makes possible these aesthetic materials and processes. Adorno himself confirms this --

The question posed by artworks is how the truth of reality can become their own truth [...] Their pure existence criticizes the existence of a spirit that exclusively manipulates its other. *What is socially untrue, flawed, and*

*ideological is communicated to the structure of artworks as flawed, indeterminate and inadequate. For the manner in which artworks react, their objective 'attitude toward objectivity', remains an attitude toward reality. (AT: 363, emphasis mine)*

#### **4.11 Hermeticity and the Extra-Aesthetic**

The aim of the previous sections has been to erode the explanatory gap which appeared between the artwork as autonomous and hermetic, and the idea of this closed autonomous process resulting in an instantiation of a socio-critical, negative truth which gave rise to an instantiation of the non-identical. The remainder of the essay will deal with the precise way in which the artwork comes to instantiate truth. However, at this point it is important to note that the explanatory gap between the hermetic aesthetic and the extra-aesthetic has been filled.

Our investigation of the mutual constitution of autonomy and heteronomy in both aesthetic processes and aesthetic materials has resulted in a theory of oblique reflection. While the artwork undeniably operates autonomously, and its processes have no intentional reference to the extra-aesthetic whatsoever, the mediation of this autonomy by heteronomy entails that the artwork's processes always already involve not only a working of aesthetic materials, but an oblique working and critique of the mediating processes which gave rise to the valencies of those aesthetic materials.

We have yet to receive an explanation of how the artwork will employ this oblique reflection in such a way as to create truth – however, it is important to recognize that the very category of oblique reflection has served to close off the most serious difficulty facing Adorno's theory of art as bearing truth-content. In the remainder of this Chapter, we will examine how the artwork employs its oblique reflection in such a way as to instantiate truth. As a corollary, I will also be demonstrating the profound affinity of aesthetic and philosophical method, and the entailed affinity of their forms of truth.

#### **4.12 Aesthetic Method and Philosophical Method: Towards a Theory of Art as Knowledge**

The remaining desiderata of this Chapter are to establish the artwork as a form of knowledge, and to establish that the artwork's form of knowledge, and resultant truth, are isomorphic to philosophy's. I will take it that a demonstration of the latter, the affinity of the artwork and philosophy's processes in attaining knowledge, will entail a demonstration of art as a form of knowledge. As such, I will move directly to demonstrating the parallelism between philosophy and art as forms of knowledge.

Presently, we have established that the aesthetic processes are determined by identity thinking, and 'dominate' their aesthetic materials in accordance with identity thinking. In this respect, this is identical to the epistemological faculties and processes operative in philosophical thought, which are also constitutively in accord with the form of identity thinking. Moreover, we have also established that aesthetic materials are determined by the same social totality which is operative in the mediation of the epistemological materials (concepts, objects, and so on) which philosophy makes use of due to the incidence of the same process of thin determination in both aesthetic and non-aesthetic contexts. The parallel between philosophy and art is clearly quite strong at this point.

However, what is distinctive about philosophy, as we saw in Chapter 3, is that it employs the delusive epistemological processes available to it in such a way as to break with those processes. It does so by forming a dialectical 'constellation' in the philosophical text, which phenomenologically demonstrates the failure of all candidate concepts. This textual demonstration is then inwardly performed by the agent, which causes the concepts which mediate his experience to fail, thereby acquainting him with the non-identical. It is this specific philosophical dialectical method which results in the knowledge of the non-identical, and thereby the knowledge that there are existents which are not exhaustible by one's present conceptual array.

While the artwork may share the same nature of its processes with philosophy, and its materials may be identically mediated, this does not entail that the truth of the artwork should be the same as the philosophical standard of truth. For this to be so, it would have to recapitulate the philosophical method summarized in the above paragraph, in order to similarly achieve a critique of the delusive mediators of experience, and entail the agent's acquaintance with the non-identical.

As I will show in the following sections, this is in fact the case. There is textual evidence in *Aesthetic Theory* that Adorno understands the artwork to recapitulate the philosophical text's approach to truth. This can best be shown by breaking down the philosophical method into three core areas – the destructively phenomenological employment of false epistemological materials in order to create a break with those materials, the employment of the dialectical constellation in order to effect this break, and the performative role of the agent as ultimately responsible for this break's taking place. I will now address each of these in turn.

#### **4.13 Creating a Break**

The unique feature of Adorno's theory of truth, as explained in the previous three Chapters, is its circumventing the falsifying mediators of experience by virtue of



engaging these false mediators, and creating a break in these mediators through this engagement. Adorno phrases this, in the philosophical context, as the attempt to instantiate truth by virtue of breaking with concepts 'in [their] own measure' (ND: 5 / 17). In Adorno's aesthetic philosophy this feature, of creating an immanent break, is also present. This is most clearly demonstrated in the extract below-

It is by way of concepts, however, that art sets free its mimetic, nonconceptual layer [...] Art militates against the concept as much as it does against domination, but for this opposition it, like philosophy, requires concepts. (AT: 126)

Here, there are two things of note. First, Adorno states that art has a 'nonconceptual' layer, and 'militates against the concept'. This serves to closely tie together art and philosophy in their role as not only providing a critique of conventional conceptual thought, but also providing a grasp on the non-conceptual (non-identical) through this critique. Secondly and more importantly, the above extract states that the artwork constitutively sets free the artwork's 'nonconceptual layer' not by attempting to work outside of concepts, but in fact 'by way of concepts'. Adorno confirms that art, like philosophy, 'requires concepts', and yet these concepts must be employed such that they give rise to access to the non-conceptual. The following quote reinforces the idea that the artwork must achieve a non-conceptual break by virtue of the employment of concepts -

The truth of artworks depends on whether they succeed at absorbing into their immanent necessity what is not identical with the concept, what is according to that concept accidental. (AT: 134)

As was shown in the extract higher above (AT: 126), Adorno has asserted that art 'requires concepts'. Bearing this in mind, in the extract just cited (AT: 134) Adorno is saying that the artwork effects a break in these concepts by virtue of forcing the concepts employed in the artwork in the course of their own employment to, by virtue of their own 'immanent necessity', incorporate content which the concept took itself to exclude. This demonstrates that the artwork, like the philosophical text, effects a break in conceptuality by virtue of the immanent employment of conceptuality itself.

This shows that the way in which the artwork effects this break in conceptuality is identical in form to the philosophical employment of

constellations; the artwork forces the concept to call up other concepts and content in order to mitigate the concept's own insufficiency. If this is indeed the case, and the artwork effects a break in conceptuality in the same way as the philosophical text, this would take us further in trying to establish the uniformity of Adorno's theories of philosophical and aesthetic truth. I will try to demonstrate this in the following section.

#### **4.14 Dialectical Constellations and the Artwork**

As we have seen at length, philosophy effects its textual instantiation of the non-identical by virtue of its employment of what Adorno calls 'constellations'. These constellations are constituted by Adorno's attempt to comprehend a given topic, and then progressively employing each eligible concept and inducing them to fail. This has been covered in detail in Chapter 3, section 3.14. There is in fact exegetical evidence that Adorno takes the artwork to constitute itself in the same way, by making use of dialectical constellations.

Adorno makes it clear that the truth content of the artwork, its epistemological and socio-historical critique, is not constituted through the addition of any new content, but rather through the dialectical employment of pre-existing content. This dialectical employment constitutes the artwork's truth content and 'break' with the falsifying mediators of experience. Adorno displays this here -

Unconsciously every artwork must ask itself if and how it can exist as utopia: *always only through the constellation of its elements*. The artwork transcends not by the bare and abstract difference from the unvarying but rather by taking the unvarying into itself, taking it apart, and putting it back together again; such composition is what is usually called aesthetic creativity. Accordingly, the truth content of artworks is to be judged in terms of the extent to which they are unable to reconfigure the other *out of the unvarying*. (AT: 394, emphases mine)

Here, then, we have Adorno's claim that the artwork's instantiation of 'utopia' and the 'other' (both of which function as shorthands for the non-identical) is achieved through the '[reconfiguration of] the other out of the unvarying'. The 'aesthetic creativity' which brings about this appearance of the non-identical through the artwork is identified with nothing other than the constellation of the artwork's 'elements'. As in philosophy, then, there is the clear thought that the instantiation of the non-identical is achieved via the dialectical employment of constellations. Adorno reiterates this thought -

In artworks the name is, however, strictly negative. Artworks say what is more than the existing, and they do this exclusively by making a constellation of how it is, "Comment c'est". (AT: 175)

Here, Adorno uses the 'name' as shorthand for the identification of the non-identical. Again, as in philosophy, art says more than what is the case, but does so negatively. As we saw above, art (as constitutively experiential) is subject to the delusive mediators of experience. As such, art is subject to the same problematic as philosophy; the positive statement of the true is impossible, as it would be falsified by the mediators of experience (cf section 3.8). As such, as Adorno says, the 'name' of the artwork is 'strictly negative'. This negative grasp of the truth is achieved through what Adorno calls a 'constellation of how it is'. This reinforces the similarity of the situation of art and philosophy – both are necessarily negative, and both transcend this negativity through the employment of dialectical constellations.

Finally, Adorno gives an endorsement of the artwork's mimicking of philosophy's dialectical employment of concepts here -

That universal elements are irrevocably part of art at the same time that art opposes them, is to be understood in terms of art's likeness to language. For language is hostile to the particular and nevertheless seeks its rescue. Language mediates the particular through universality and in the constellation of the universal, but it does justice to its own universals only when they are not used rigidly in accord with the semblance of their autonomy but are rather concentrated to the extreme on what is specifically to be expressed. (AT: 268)

Here Adorno draws a direct parallel between art and language, the constitutive medium of philosophy. Language, Adorno asserts, is problematized by its innate '[hostility] to the particular' (this hostility deriving from the conceptual mediation of experience) and yet 'nevertheless seeks its rescue' through 'universality and the constellation of the universal'. This suffices as a summary of the philosophical method which we examined in Chapters 2 and 3, and posited as the constitutive element in the philosophical text which allows for an instantiation of the non-identical. Adorno then asserts that art's own relationship to concepts ('universal elements') are likewise to be construed in this manner. As such, art, like philosophy, is problematized by the falsifying role of universals, and also resolves this problematic through the dialectical

employment of constellations. However, of course, art, unlike philosophy, does not construct these constellations explicitly with reference to concepts, but instead conducts itself autonomously.

So, we have seen that for Adorno the artwork is constructed by dialectical procedures which, like philosophy, result in what Adorno terms 'constellations'. These constellations are constructed (in the artwork) by interrogating and attempting to reconcile the valencies of aesthetic materials. The key consequence to be drawn from this is that the artwork bears the same *textual* performativity as the philosophical text. Just as in the case of the philosophical text, the artwork employs problematic concepts and, in the course of their employment, causes the concept to display its insufficiency. As in the context of philosophy, the displayed insufficiency of the concept thereby calls up other concepts and causes a dialectical constellation.

We need to briefly add our account of oblique reflection, as expounded above, to this account of the affinity of the artwork and the philosophical text. We are presently asserting that the artwork and philosophical text both instantiate a textually performative critique of concepts. However, we need to outline how art's hermetic procedure amounts to this conceptual critique.

First, we must note that both the artwork and the philosophical text present, in their respective media, the *same* dialectical complex of concepts. Which is to say, that which is present in each is determined by the same conceptual totality, with the same obtaining conceptual aporias.<sup>69</sup> This is so just due to the influence of a single process, thin determination, on both philosophical and aesthetic materials. The aesthetic materials, and their valencies, are obliquely determined by both concepts and the social totality. As such, the artwork's dialectical working of those aesthetic valencies serves as an oblique mirror of the philosophical dialectical method. The hermetic procedure of following the aesthetico-logical demands of aesthetic materials *amounts* to a conceptual constellation, just because these valencies are nothing other than the oblique reflection of the conceptual mediation which governs them. Valencies are themselves determined by conceptual content. As such, the dialectical working and development of these valencies will result in the artwork presenting, in the *completed* artwork, a formal whole which will engage the agent's concepts and induce them to fail. The contradictions latent in concepts are translated into aesthetic logic – the working of the aesthetic processes on this aesthetic logic results in a completed artwork.

As has been said, the aesthetico-logical properties of the aesthetic contents are

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<sup>69</sup> Presuming the artwork and philosophical text are contemporaneous.

not merely passively received, but are in fact worked on by the artist. This working takes these aesthetico-logical demands and tendencies and extrapolates and develops them. As a consequence, these aesthetico-logical tendencies often result in the aesthetic equivalent of philosophical contradiction. Authentic artworks encounter aporias and irresolvable formal problematics, just as authentic philosophy terminates in the display of contradictions, aporias, etc.

These purely aesthetic formal developments become conceptually critical just due to the conceptual mediation of perception. On the agent perceiving the completed artwork, the concepts which obliquely determined the formal demands of the aesthetic content reappear and are re-engaged by the agent viewing the completed artwork. As such, if the completed artwork engages the concepts and leads them, during the agent's performative engagement with the artwork, into contradiction, then the conceptual mediation of experience will be lead to break down just as in the case of philosophical performativity.

The conceptual structure of experience has certain latent contradictions. This same conceptual structure lends aesthetico-logical form to the contents worked by the aesthetic. The logical demands of these aesthetic contents, then, are determined by and reflective of these contradictions. However, these contradictions have been translated out of a conceptual medium and into the medium of aesthetic form. In constructing the artwork, the aesthetic processes work these formal demands and develop them. Just as in the philosophical case, development of these formal tendencies reveals these latent contradictions. Once completed, the artwork displays these contradictions, translated back into a conceptual medium (viz., experience). As such, the artwork presents to the agent a dialectically constructed 'text' wherein the aesthetic contents, and their attendant conceptual mediation, is isomorphic with the agent's own conceptual array. As such, the artwork's autonomous, dialectical form is also always already a latent critique of the conceptual array which determined it. It only stands in need of the agent's own performative engagement to vitalize this conceptual critique and create the desired conceptual break, as in philosophy. This will be demonstrated in the following section.

To conclude this section, then, the artwork's dialectical treatment of its aesthetic materials, due to these materials being constituted by conceptual and socio-historical mediation, amounts to the same as the philosophical text's dialectical treatment of its explicitly conceptual material. By 'the same' I mean that, in either case, the finished product (the artwork or philosophical text) bears in itself a dialectical construct which engages the concepts of the agent's conceptual array and induces them to fail. The philosophical text does so explicitly; the artwork does so obliquely, by virtue of the thin

determination of the aesthetic materials, and the conceptual mediation of experience. This amounts to their *textual* performativity. For the artwork, like the philosophical text, bears on its face a destructively phenomenological treatment of concepts. Adorno makes this *textual* performativity explicit -

The truth content of artworks, as the negation of their existence, is mediated by them though they do not in any way communicate it. *That by which truth content is more than what is posited by artworks* is their methesis in history and *the determinate critique that they exercise through their form*. (AT: 175, emphases mine)

Adorno asserts that the critical function of the artwork allows it to instantiate a truth-content which exceeds the artwork itself. As we saw in section 4.3. (and will see in section 4.15) this truth which lies beyond the artwork itself is the non-identical. Adorno identifies the critique in the artwork which constitutes this access to the non-identical with the artwork's *form*. It is through its formal properties that the artwork exercises its critique.

#### **4.15 The Performative Role of the Agent**

Now that we have established that the artwork bears a textual performativity in the same sense as the philosophical text bears a textual performativity, and moreover that it is formed in the same dialectical fashion, we now only need to demonstrate that Adorno holds that the artwork needs to be conjoined to the agent's own internal performance to finally demonstrate the affinity between Adorno's philosophical and aesthetic theories of truth.

Once again, there is exegetical evidence that Adorno does, just as for philosophy, claim that the truth of art is constituted by both the artwork and the agent's performative engagement with the artwork in equal measure. For example, here –

That artworks say something and in the same breath conceal it expresses this enigmaticalness from the perspective of language. This characteristic cavorts clownishly; if one is within the artwork, if one participates in its immanent completion, this enigmaticalness makes itself invisible; if one steps outside the work, breaking the contract with its immanent context, this enigmaticalness returns like a spirit [...] Whoever refuses to reenact the work under the discipline it imposes falls under the empty gaze [of the artwork, which reveals nothing]. (AT: 160)

What is most important in the above is that the artwork's 'enigmaticalness', its failure to divest a determinate, subsumable content, is only overcome by an active *participation* in the artwork. This participation is termed by Adorno a re-enactment of the work 'under the discipline it imposes'. Adorno posits this role of the agent as necessary in order to avoid falling under the 'empty gaze' of the artwork (i.e., to not become like those Adorno terms the 'art-alien' (AT: 160), who are incapable of a genuine relationship to and interpretation of the artwork). Just as in the case of philosophy, art is held to have a content which is not reducible merely to its apparent phenomena, but in fact also requires the agent's own engagement. This strongly suggests that art, like philosophy, is held by Adorno to require a performative engagement from the agent in order to fully disclose its content.

This is reinforced in this final extract, in which Adorno explicitly draws this comparison -

By reading the spirit of artworks out of their configurations and confronting the elements with each other and with the spirit that appears in them, critique passes over into the truth of the spirit, which is located beyond the aesthetic configuration. This is why critique is necessary to the works. In the spirit of the works critique recognizes their truth content or distinguishes truth content from spirit. Only in this act, and not through any philosophy of art that would dictate to art what its spirit must be, do art and philosophy converge. (AT: 116)

What is most striking about this, of course, is that Adorno is here asserting that 'art and philosophy converge'. However, what is most important is Adorno's assertion that the 'truth of the spirit' (the intellectual component of the artwork) is 'located beyond the aesthetic configuration' (i.e., is not equivalent merely to the presented properties of the artwork). He simultaneously asserts that in 'the act' of critique the truth is revealed – and this act is constituted by 'reading the spirit of artworks out of their configurations and confronting the elements with each other'. The artwork, then, holds a truth of spirit which is 'beyond the aesthetic configuration' – i.e., not equivalent to the immediate properties of the artwork. However, Adorno denies that it is some intellectual content which can be extracted from the artwork (à la Hegel). While Adorno holds this truth to be 'beyond the aesthetic configuration' it nonetheless can only be comprehended *through* this configuration. In the act of critique enacted by the agent, the truth is 'read out' of the aesthetic configuration, and bound up with it. This sounds identical in nature

to the problematic encountered in Chapter 3. Namely, that the philosophical content was located beyond the conceptual content of the philosophical text, and yet was nonetheless posited as being accessed by the agent's interaction with that philosophical text.

As in the case of philosophy, then, the truth content of the artwork is incompatible with the nature of the medium in question (as the truth content is non-identical, and the medium is in accord with identity thinking), and yet nonetheless must be 'read out' of that medium, by virtue of the agent's own performative engagement with that medium. As such, Adorno is claiming that the artwork sets up a truth which is not identical to the artwork's actual constitution.<sup>70</sup> In the philosophical context, this opposition of the truth to the discursive constitution of the philosophical text was solved by the performative engagement of the agent. From the evidence already adduced, and Adorno's statement that the aesthetic problematic 'converges' with the philosophical, we may take this as legitimation for reading art as demanding the same kind of performative engagement of the agent as philosophy.

However, we do not need to rest content just with this, as Adorno in fact provides proof –

Pure immediacy does not suffice for aesthetic experience. Along with the involuntary it requires volition, concentrating consciousness; the contradiction is ineluctable. All beauty reveals itself to persistent analysis, which in turn enriches the element of involuntariness; indeed, analysis would be in vain if the involuntary did not reside hidden within it. In the face of beauty, analytical reflection reconstitutes the *temps durée* through its antithesis. Analysis terminates in beauty just as it ought to appear to complete and self-forgetting unconscious perception. Thus analysis subjectively redescribes the course that the artwork objectively describes within itself: Adequate knowledge of the aesthetic is the spontaneous completion of the objective processes that, by virtue of the tensions of this completion, transpire within it. (AT: 91)

Here, Adorno is tracing a relationship between analysis and the artwork itself which is

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<sup>70</sup> 'By reading the spirit of artworks out of their configurations and confronting the elements with each other and with the spirit that appears in them, critique passes over into the truth of the spirit, *which is located beyond the aesthetic configuration* [...] If the spirit of artworks were literally identical with their sensual elements and their organization, spirit would be nothing but the quintessence of the appearance [... rather], [i]f the spirit of artworks flashes up in their sensual appearance, it does so only as their negation.' (AT: 116 – 117, emphasis mine).



identical to the problematic of the relationship between the 'philosophical demonstration' and 'discursively true' Adorno discovered in Chapter 4. The artwork in aesthetic experience constitutes itself through the 'involuntariness' of 'pure immediacy'. However, this 'involuntary', immediate experience is necessarily accompanied by 'volition, concentrating consciousness'. As such, 'aesthetic experience' is constituted by a dialectic between an immediate truth of the work, and the conceptually mediated element which makes this immediacy viable. As Adorno puts it, analysis 'enriches the element of involuntariness'. A complicated dialectical relation is being drawn between the immediate truth of aesthetic experience, and the intellectually mediated grounds of that experience.

The extract above also subtly transitions from consideration of the constitution of optimal aesthetic experience, to the related issue of the optimal relationship between aesthetic analysis and aesthetic experience. Adorno asserts that the 'pure immediacy' of aesthetic experience must be accompanied by, and translated into, 'analysis', which 'reconstitutes' this experience 'through its antithesis'. As such, Adorno is introducing a dialectical opposition between an immediate, non-discursive truth-content of the artwork which demands to be reconstituted by 'its antithesis' – i.e., a conceptually mediated, complex analysis. This analysis, Adorno claims, 'redescribes the course that the artwork objectively describes within itself'. As such, then, the truth of the artwork is the 'antithesis' of the language of analysis (i.e., conceptual discourse), but nonetheless must be re-translated into this language of analysis. Compare this to Adorno's analysis of the relationship between philosophical demonstration and discursive knowledge -

[I]n philosophy the authentic question will somehow almost always include its answer. Unlike science, philosophy knows no fixed sequence of question and answer [...] This distinguishes the relation of understanding and judgment from the usual order of time [...] What is transmitted here is the fiber of the so-called philosophical demonstration, a mode of proof that contrasts with the mathematical model. And yet that model does not simply disappear, for the stringency of a philosophical thought requires its mode of proceeding to be measured by the forms of inference. Philosophical proof is the effort to give statements a binding quality by making them commensurable with the means of discursive thinking. But it does not purely follow from that thinking: the critical reflection of such cogitative productivity is itself a philosophical content. (ND: 63 – 64 / 71 - 72)

A detailed analysis of this extract from *Negative Dialectics* was given in Chapter 3,

section 3.11. Here, Adorno claims that philosophy is caught between the immediacy of 'philosophical demonstration' and the 'mathematical model'. The former is non-discursive but, due to the 'stringency' of thought, 'requires' a retranslation into the rational discourse of the mathematical model. As in the aesthetic case, then, the immediate content, the access to the non-identical, entails and requires a discursive, rational instantiation. Just as art has the opposition between 'immediacy' and 'analysis', philosophy has the opposition between 'philosophical demonstration' and 'discursive thinking'.

Here we can see that Adorno is drawing a strikingly direct correspondence between the aesthetic and philosophical modes of comprehension. In either case the medium of expression (the philosophical text; the artwork) is by itself insufficient. The conventional mode of understanding the medium (conventional philosophical discourse; aesthetic analysis) is found to be insufficient. True comprehension is achieved in an *immediate* experience of truth, which is derived from the agent's internalized performance of that contained in the medium of expression. This immediate experience is opposed to the conventional, discursive mode of comprehension, but nonetheless entails and requires it. As Adorno puts it in the aesthetic context, the 'pure immediacy' of the artwork must be re-expressed '*through its antithesis*', namely conceptual analysis. As such, the 'spontaneous completion' of the artwork's 'objective processes' which takes place in the observer's experience is necessary for '[a]dequate knowledge of the aesthetic'. However, this 'pure immediacy', Adorno asserts, is insufficient, and must be accompanied by discursive analysis.

Adorno, then, is reinstating here the dichotomy which was characteristic of philosophical truth. Namely, that there is a complex relationship between a discursive expression of the truth, which accords with pre-established conditions of validity and a form of experiential, immediate truth which is opposed to the former but must be retranslated into it. Adorno is clearly setting up the same problematic in the case of the aesthetic.

You will recall that the solution to this problematic, in the case of philosophy, was the addition of the performative engagement of the agent. This performative engagement of the agent vitalized, as it were, the concrete truth of the philosophical text through performatively internalizing it. This performative internalization established a break-down in the mediators of experience, and hence an experiential acquaintance with the non-identical. It is my claim that Adorno also extends this solution to the aesthetic problematic. As such, then, aesthetics and philosophy are also united in their solution to their shared problematic. In each case, the discursive standard of understanding (philosophical discursive thinking; standards of aesthetic analysis) are

insufficient and falsifying by virtue of their employment of conceptual discourse, and in each case the proposed answer is the agent's own immediate cognitive performance of the philosophical text or artwork. Adorno makes this clear in the aesthetic context -

Adequate knowledge of the aesthetic is the spontaneous completion of the objective processes that, by virtue of the tensions of this completion, transpire within it. (AT: 91)

This serves as a very concise assertion by Adorno that the correct comprehension of the aesthetic entails a performative element. In the philosophical case, the role of performativity was to liberate the philosophical content, by means of the concept, from conceptuality itself. Intriguingly, Adorno here asserts the same, obliquely, for art. Adequate knowledge of the aesthetic requires the agent to performatively engage with the constitutive processes within the artwork and to *complete* them. In other words, Adorno notes that the processes transpiring in the artwork are presently *incomplete* – it falls to the agent to add his performative element, and complete the artwork, and thereby attain adequate knowledge of the artwork. Performativity for the aesthetic, as for philosophy, is a condition on the true completion of the artwork as a mode of knowledge -

[U]nderstanding specific artworks [...] requires an objective experiential reenactment from within in the same sense in which the interpretation of a musical work means its faithful performance. (AT: 161)

As for philosophy, then, performativity is required to solve the dilemma of the the rational / non-rational modes of knowledge, and finally attain the non-identical.

#### **4.16 Performative Engagement and Access to the Non-Identical**

Now we have seen that aesthetics, like philosophy, requires the performative engagement of the agent, we need to make clear how this performative engagement gives rise to access to the non-identical. You will recall that in the case of philosophy, this was reasonably clear. The philosophical text with which the agent performatively engages employs the self-same concepts which mediate experience – as such, understanding how an engagement with a discursive critique of theoretical concepts could result in the breakdown of the concept's mediating function was quite transparent.

However, as we have seen, the artwork does not take concepts as its aesthetic

materials, nor does it transparently employ concepts in the process of aesthetic formation. This being so, we are presently without an understanding of how the subject's performative engagement with the artwork is intended to give rise to the required break in the conceptual mediation of his experience.

As it happens, this is in fact reasonably easy to explain, as soon as we make use of the idea of oblique reflection which we began examining above.

We established above (in section 4.10), that the aesthetic materials which are worked on by the aesthetic processes are obliquely determined by the conceptual array. As such, their behaviour when being worked by the aesthetic processes (which are themselves determined by and a form of conceptual practice), and the artwork which results from their being worked, is reflective of the conceptual array. As such, the problematic of the artwork (its dilemmas, its formal development, etc.) is in fact an instantiation of the problematic of concepts (cf. section 4.10).

The conceptual structure of the agent's experience is identical to that conceptual array which determines the aesthetic problematic.<sup>71</sup> With this comes the caveat that concepts are obliquely at work in the artwork, rather than directly, as in the case of philosophy. This obliquity, however, does not change the fact that the artwork *is* conceptually constituted and, when encountered by the agent, engages the agent's conceptual array -

Although artworks are neither conceptual nor judgmental, they are logical. In them nothing would be enigmatic if their immanent logicity did not accommodate discursive thought, whose criteria they nevertheless regularly disappoint [...] The unity that artworks [...] achieve makes them analogous to the logic of experience. (AT: 180)

Adorno correctly maintains that the artwork cannot be consistently seen as either conceptual or judgmental. Our examination of the artwork's autonomy served to demonstrate why this is; the artwork constitutes itself wholly with reference to aesthetic properties, and in no way attempts to capture, describe or conceptually subsume anything extra-aesthetic. However, and this returns to the artwork's status as dialectical critique, the artwork nonetheless 'accommodate[s] discursive thought' while 'disappoint[ing]' its 'criteria'. While the artwork may be formed aconceptually, it

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<sup>71</sup> This equivalence, between the determining structures of experience and a given medium, was demonstrated at length in the case of philosophy (cf. section 3.15). As both philosophy and art are subject to the same determining influences, there is no need to fashion a new argument for the case of art; the argument concerning philosophy can be taken as applying in this case also.

nonetheless (once completed) presents a conceptually germane unity which engages, and is 'analogous' to, the 'logic of experience' (AT: 180). The artwork accommodates and engages, then, the agent's conceptual faculties as he performatively engages with the artwork, while simultaneously frustrating these concepts.

This combination of the engagement of concepts and frustration of the self-same concepts according to their criteria (by which they are being engaged) which Adorno here describes is nothing other than dialectical method, and does not differ from the manner in which philosophy performatively effects its critique. As such, the agent's performative engagement with the artwork engages his concepts just as a philosophical text does, the only difference being that it is not immediately apparent to the agent that the artwork is conceptually constituted. As the artwork effects a dialectical critique of concepts just as philosophy does, this engagement likewise results in a break being effected in the conceptual structure of experience, and an experience of the non-identical.

We can see from the above, then, that the aesthetic not only shares in the problematic of philosophy, but also breaks out of this problematic, like philosophy, in order to access the non-identical in the same manner. Moreover, this entails a unification of the theory of truth for each; both dialectically work their respective materials, which bear the determination of the social totality. The dialectical working of these materials results in the display of the contradictory and insufficient nature of the epistemological whole which determined these materials. This static critique, however, then has added to it the agent's own performative engagement with that critique which, by virtue of the direct use of concepts in the case of philosophy, and by virtue of the oblique determination of aesthetic materials by concepts in the case of aesthetics, results in the breaking of the conceptual mediation of experience. This breaking of the conceptual mediation of experience, results in the acquaintance of the agent with the non-identical.

We have seen, then, that the theory of truth content which Adorno holds for philosophy and aesthetics is unified. Although there is a degree of differentiation in the philosophical and aesthetic modes (due to aesthetics making use of oblique, as opposed to direct, second reflection), nonetheless both take place in an identically constituted problematic, and employ an identical solution to this solution, namely the performative engagement of the agent. While, as was said at the introduction of this thesis, this Chapter is by necessity more than speculative than the first two, I take it that this suffices to establish the claim that Adorno's aesthetics and philosophy share a unified theory of truth as, at the very least, plausible.

#### 4.17 Oblique Second Reflection

In closing, I should like to return to a desideratum that was laid out at the outset of this Chapter. Namely, that the specificity of the artwork should be respected. As much as Adorno posits art and philosophy as interlinked (AT: 116), and understands art as requiring philosophical interpretation (AT: 120) it is still the case that Adorno acknowledges that the artwork should be understood as constituting itself solely along aesthetic lines. Which is to say, that regardless of its relationship to the truth and philosophy, the artwork does not concern itself with either of these; rather it is solely formed according to aesthetic criteria. While I hope to have made clear throughout my commitment to this understanding of the artwork, I am conscious that the claim that the artwork has the same mode of truth as philosophy may have gone some way to obscuring this commitment on my part. I would like to just re-affirm, and demonstrate, that the theory of the artwork's truth here expounded does not reduce art to philosophy.

What philosophy and art share, according to Adorno, is their ability to dialectically employ falsifying and delusive processes such that this delusiveness is made to display itself, through the emergence of contradiction, antinomy, etc., and the addition of the agent's internal performance. As we saw in Chapters 1 to 3, philosophy achieves this by virtue of intentionally engaging epistemological materials, and inducing them to fail through dialectical method. This dialectical method was then combined with a rhetorical style which displayed the destructive phenomenology of these epistemological materials in the course of their employment. This in turn was combined with the agent's own performance of this destructive phenomenology, which engaged his concepts and induced them to fail. This philosophical process was explicitly concerned with achieving the truth, and engaged directly with the concepts which mediated experience. Adorno termed this 'second reflection' (ND: 44 / 54) – it is a meta-critical investigation of those epistemological processes and materials which make experience and thought possible. This explicit second reflection engages the reified nature of concepts and the epistemological whole directly.

Now, art itself, as we have seen, effects the critique which Adorno identifies as a product of second reflection. Adorno himself makes explicit art's instantiation of a second reflection –

Second reflection lays hold of the technical procedures, the language of the artwork in the broadest sense, but it aims at blindness [...] Unexpectedly confirming Hegel's thesis of the transformation of mediation into immediacy, second reflection restores naïveté in the relation of [aesthetic] content to first reflection. (AT: 34)

However, while art is constituted by an ongoing process of second reflection, which produces 'the critique of the omnipotence of reason' (AT: 35) via the artwork, art cannot be directly assimilated to the second reflection of philosophy. Where art differs significantly from philosophy is that, while it recapitulates philosophy's critique of the obtaining totality, and moreover also instantiates this critique in a medium which requires the agent's performative engagement in order to effect an acquaintance with the non-identical, this procedure is entirely *non-intentional*. The artwork, for itself, has no reference to anything other than the artwork and its constituent aesthetic materials. As such, the artwork cannot be understood as identical to philosophy's second reflection, just because the artwork does not explicitly reflect on thought, or the categories of thought, at all. Rather, art should be understood as an oblique second reflection – it effects the same critique as philosophy, in showing the insufficiency of concepts, but does so inadvertently, by virtue of the mediation of its material. Adorno himself confirms this, in outlining the most significant difference between art and philosophy –

The affinity of [aesthetic] construction with cognitive processes, or perhaps rather with their interpretation by the theory of knowledge, is no less evident than is their difference, which is that art does not make judgments and when it does, it shatters its own concept. (AT: 74)

Here Adorno is referring to and confirming the oblique nature of art's second reflection. Art achieves this second reflection wholly without judgment. Any attempt on art's part to intentionally bring about its critical function would, as Adorno points out, '[shatter] its own concept', by betraying the artwork's hermetic nature.

As such, while philosophy and art both effect a critique of their mediation, and thereby instantiate the non-identical, the second reflection of art is differentiated from that of philosophy, due to its oblique nature. This obliquity constitutes the essence of the aesthetic, as we have seen; it is only through its sacrifice of any explicit attempt to comprehend or know the extra-aesthetic that it is capable of attaining the condition of being knowledge of the non-identical.

With this conclusion, gesturing towards the unified yet differentiated theory of truth which applies both to philosophy and art, this dissertation comes to a close. I have attempted to argue that Adorno's aesthetics and philosophy are deeply imbricated; and to demonstrate that Adorno's work represents not merely a materialist refinement of Hegel and dialectical refinement of Marx, but in fact a unique and valuable species of

materialist-transcendental philosophy. In his unification of a 'logic of disintegration' and a strong commitment to determinate truth, Adorno represents a theoretic position which has been scarcely recognized, let alone explored - and perhaps purposely buried in the headlong rush into post-modernism, deconstruction, and 'play'. Fittingly, then, Adorno's own work is now a discarded ruin, simultaneously neglected by 'progress' and promising an alternative to it.



## **Appendix – Concrete Applications of My Interpretation of Adorno's Aesthetic Theory**

Chapter 4 covered my interpretation of Adorno's aesthetic theory, and its relationship to truth. I set out my reading of Adorno by providing exegesis of Adorno's methodological remarks, as well as comparing much of Adorno's writing in *Aesthetic Theory* with programmatic assertions made in non-aesthetic contexts. An obvious downside of this approach is that little space was given to demonstrating how Adorno actually applies this theory of aesthetic truth to actual artworks.

It is notable, on reading Adorno's writings on artworks, as opposed to his writings on aesthetic theory, that his analyses of artworks diverge strongly from what the account of Adorno's aesthetic theory in Chapter 4 might lead one to expect. They are far more diverse in approach, tone and selected subject matter. Adorno does not reduce an artwork merely to its aesthetico-logical constitution and proceed to trace the grounds of this aesthetico-logical complex in heteronomous influences. Nor does he frequently devote considerable space to tracing the interaction of these aesthetico-logical complexes with the conceptual structure of experience, and the resultant instantiation of the non-identical.

This stands in need of explanation. Has the explanation given in Chapter 4 simply failed to map onto Adorno's work? I do not think so. While I will provide in this Appendix an example of Adorno's analyses of artworks matching up with my account, it is important to first of all note that there is an important difference between aesthetic *theory* and the practice of aesthetic *analysis*.

As Adorno himself stated explicitly, the goal of the analysis of an artwork is not to pretend to 'discover' in the artwork support for the conclusions of some theoretical position, but rather to 'contemplatively immerse' oneself in the artwork's specificity (AT: 232). This should not be taken as license to have one's theoretical position diverge from the nature of specific artworks. Rather, it is a difference in hermeneutic procedure – the artwork is investigated in its specific nature, and it is this nature which is unfolded, without pre-established theoretic conclusions determining one's analysis (AT: 232).

The upshot of this is that Adorno is not, in analyzing artworks, in the business of taking care to visibly instantiate his theoretical position. Rather, he intends to unfold the artwork in its full specificity. The extent to which this is achieved through theoretical statements or concrete analysis of the artwork, and the extent to which either is informed by the other, is a matter of dialectical tension. And the precise make-up and resolution of this tension is not decidable in advance for any artwork (AT: 237 - 238).

The failure to find in every concrete analysis a set of assertions visibly reiterating Adorno's theoretical position, then, should not be surprising, nor should it be a matter of concern.

There is a second reason that Adorno's analyses (as well as, in fact, his explicitly methodological work, like *Aesthetic Theory*) often diverges, or is not wholly reducible to, the account I have given in Chapter 4. This is simply that, as I noted at the outset, my account is intended to cover *one* facet of Adorno's aesthetic theory. It is not the case that Adorno feels that the only feature of the artwork worthy of consideration is its instantiation of the non-identical; nor is it the case that Adorno takes it that the artwork is solely constituted by its relationship to the non-identical and conceptual contradictions. (For example, Adorno takes it that the formal make-up of the artwork is also determined by what he calls 'aesthetic technology' (AT: 76 - 77), which is the autonomous development of aesthetic techniques, such as advances in the depiction of perspective). My account is focused on an *aspect* of Adorno's aesthetic theory. I certainly do take this aspect to be the most significant and valuable aspect of Adorno's aesthetic theory. However, it is from Adorno's point of view only one aspect among a very large number.

It is important to bear in mind, then, that the account given in Chapter 4 is an attempt to elucidate a central aspect of Adorno's aesthetic theory which intentionally does not give an account of the countless other strands in Adorno's work. As such, we should not expect Adorno's concrete analyses to devote themselves wholly to putting my account into action – Adorno's account is far more rich than that. Even if Adorno were devoting himself wholly to tracing aesthetic truth content, we saw in Chapter 3 that Adorno allows for multiple layers of truth, slotting in 'below', as it were, the unqualified truth of the non-identical. We should expect Adorno to investigate all of these various layers, not merely the non-identical itself. And this is in fact what we find.

All of this being said, I would like to turn to demonstrating that, although the account given in Chapter 4 should not be seen as necessarily central to concrete analysis, and although the relationship of Adorno's analyses to his theoretical work is difficult, there are nonetheless examples of Adorno's analyses employing the account I have set-up. Further, there is a clear relationship between this account and specific artworks set up by Adorno.

This relationship is most clearly visible in Adorno's work on Beethoven. Adorno's *Nachlass* contains a great deal of preparatory work for an uncompleted monograph on Beethoven. These notes provide an excellent example of how the theoretical position outlined in Chapter 4 might be married to specific artworks.

In writing on Beethoven, Adorno insists, without analogy or intended hyperbole,

that the composer's work is Hegelian in substance (Adorno 1998 : 11). Adorno grounds and explains the successes and failures of Beethoven's work in the argot of Hegelianism -

The special relationship between the systems of Beethoven and Hegel lies in the fact that the unity of the whole is to be understood merely as something mediated. Not only is the individual element insignificant, but the individual moments are estranged from each other [...] Beethoven's music is Hegelian philosophy: but at the same time it is truer than that philosophy [...] Logical identity as immanent to form – as an entity at the same time fabricates and aesthetic – is both constituted and criticized by Beethoven. (Adorno 1998: 13 -14)

As Adorno points out, however, this parallelism is assuredly not intended by Beethoven, who was not plausibly influenced by Hegel's philosophy (Adorno 1998 : 44). The parallel between Hegel and Beethoven is created not by the intention of the composer, then, but by the same social whole expressing itself through the two men -

The history of ideas, and thus the history of music, is an autarchic motivational context insofar as the social law, on the one hand, produces the formation of spheres screened off against each other, and on the other hand, as the law of totality, still comes to light in each sphere as the same law [...] It is in fitting together under their own law, as becoming, negating, confirming themselves and the whole without looking outward, that [Beethoven's] movements come to resemble the world whose forces move them; they do not do it by imitating that world. In this respect Beethoven's attitude on social objectivity is more that of philosophy – the Kantian, in some points, and the Hegelian in the decisive ones [.]. (Adorno 1998: 43)

This is all perfectly in keeping with the account we arrived at in Chapter 4; the problematic of aesthetic and philosophical material is identically constituted by the social totality. 'Social law' produces the 'spheres' of philosophy and music (among others, of course) and expresses itself ('comes to light in') each, despite their being 'screened off against each other'. Philosophy and music are united, despite their separation, as the same social law transpires in each. Adorno goes on, however, to begin filling in the picture of how philosophical problematics are instantiated in the context of Beethoven's music. We already see, in the above extract, that Adorno begins

to fill in the picture of how Beethoven's music, in particular, comes to recapitulate the problematic of the social law. Adorno claims that it is at the level of movements that the social whole comes to be instantiated and critiqued -

At this point a precise analysis of the D major passage from the slow movement of the great String Quartet in F major [op. 59,1: third movement, bars 70ff] must be given. In the formal sense this passage appears superfluous, since it comes after a quasi-retransition, after which the recapitulation is expected to follow immediately. But when the recapitulation fails to appear it is made clear that formal identity is insufficient, manifesting itself as true only at the moment when it, as the real, is opposed by the possible which lies outside identity. The D<sup>b</sup> major theme is new: it is not reducible to the economy of motivic unity. (Adorno 1998: 14)

Here Adorno begins to trace a critique of the 'self-reproduction of society as a self-identical entity' by frustrating the principle of 'logical identity' (Adorno 1998: 14). In the above extract, this critique of logical identity is found in the frustration of the relationship between 'retransition' and 'recapitulation'. These two terms refer to structural features of sonatas; the retransition serves to complete the middle triad of a sonata ('development'), which develops the themes and figures from the opening section ('exposition'). On the completion of the development, represented by the close of the retransition, the recapitulation should follow, which serves to restate the thematic content of the exposition.

The specific interest of the 'D major passage' which Adorno points to, then, is that it inserts into the interstices between the completion of the retransition and the beginning of the recapitulation a new theme which is not found in the exposition, nor derived from the development of that found in the exposition (as he puts it – it is not 'reducible to the economy of motivic unity'). The governing structure of the sonata form, then, is negated by virtue of a frustration of the immediate relationship between the development and recapitulation through Beethoven's insertion of an unanticipated new theme.

This serves an example of how, at level of thematic development in the sonata form, Adorno locates Beethoven's truth content which is both akin to and 'truer than' (Adorno 1998: 14) Hegel's philosophy. Beethoven begins a critique of the immediacy of the formal whole demanded by the sonata. As Adorno puts it -

The developmental tendency in those works of Beethoven which precede

the late style itself is opposed to the principle of transition. The transition is felt to be banal, "inessential"; that is, the relation of disparate moments to a whole which holds them together is seen as no more than a prescribed convention, no longer tenable. (Adorno 1998: 14)

Beethoven begins to criticize the principle of logical identity by dissolving the immediately apparent necessary formal relationships (such as the transition between development and recapitulation) into in fact mediated 'prescribed convention' which is 'no longer tenable' (Adorno 1998: 14). As Adorno puts it

[T]he recapitulation in Beethoven remains aesthetically dubious in the same fundamental way as does the thesis of identity in Hegel [...] Out of the recapitulation Beethoven produced the identity of the non-identical (Adorno 1998: 17).

This presence of a critique of logical identity is not isolated to this specific work of Beethoven's – for example, Adorno also locates a similar example in Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 29 (Adorno 1998: 19 – 20).

Adorno also associates the critique of this social whole with Beethoven's employment of motives. Motivic composition conducts itself by means of short note patterns which are repeatedly subjected to variation and, less commonly, wholesale repetition. These motive patterns can be constituted by patterns in melody, rhythmic cadence, or harmonic relationships. In Beethoven's employment of these motives, we once again see traced Beethoven's astringent relationship to logical identity and the totality -

The motive kernels, the particulars to which each movement is tied, are themselves identical with the universal; they are formulas of tonality, reduced to nothingness as things of their own and preshaped by the totality as much as the individual is in individualistic society. The developing variation, an image of social labour, is definite negation: from what has once been posited it ceaselessly brings forth the new and enhanced by destroying it in its immediacy, its quasi-natural form. (Adorno 1998: 43 -44)

The motives, then, are taken by Adorno to be immediate elements of the totality. When mediated by Beethoven's compositional practice, however, they begin to bring 'forth the new' and destroy their immediate, apparent identity with the totality (that 'quasi-

natural form'). Just as in the case of sonata form, then, we see that Beethoven's compositional form causes a deterioration in the apparent seamless identity of the aesthetic materials and pre-given form. The immediacy of the aesthetic materials is destroyed by his work, and their consequent mediated form reveals the whole to be 'no longer tenable' (Adorno 1998: 14).

Just as Adorno traces the contradictions in the elements of the social totality, then, Beethoven displays this totality in the formal qualities of his music:

All these implications of Beethoven result from musical analysis without any daring analogies, but to social knowledge they prove as true as the inferences about society itself. Society recurs in great music: transfigured, criticized and reconciled[.] (Adorno 1998: 44)

As a final note, an explanation of how Adorno feels society is 'reconciled' in great music. The analysis of Beethoven given above implies that Adorno takes Beethoven's music to be entirely critical of society. However, Adorno notes that Beethoven, in fact imports an ideological reconciliation into his analysis. This 'affirmative' (Adorno 1998: 44) moment in Beethoven's music is identified with the music's reliance on the reprise (Adorno 1998: 44). The reprise, the return in the composition of the original themes of the piece, represents to Adorno:

the force of crushing repression, of an authoritarian "That's how it is" [...] The self-exaggerating assurance that the return of the first is the meaning, the self-revelation of immanence as transcendence – this is the cryptogram for the senselessness of a merely self-reproducing reality that has been welded together into a system. (Adorno 1998: 44)

The reprise becomes ideological by means of its apparent privileging of some original content which stands over and above the dialectical elaboration of the aesthetic material.<sup>72</sup> To Adorno, this represents a 'formalistic residue' (Adorno 1998: 44). It presents Beethoven's compositional practice at its least mediated and dialectically considered, and most conventional. It represents a failure of Beethoven to completely integrate the formal and content-led demands of his art. This failure, however, is not contingent but socio-historically enforced. The reprise is:

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<sup>72</sup> There are interesting, if distant, resonances of Adorno's declamation of Heidegger's privileging putatively 'primitive' contents in his philosophy here.

the tribute Beethoven was forced to pay to the ideological character whose spell extends even to the most sublime music ever to aim at freedom under continued unfreedom [...] A composer is always a *zoon politikon* as well, the more so the more emphatic his purely musical claim [...] The fact that Beethoven's music is structured like the society to which [...] we give the name of "rising bourgeoisie", or at least like its self-consciousness and its conflicts, is premised on another fact: that the primary-musical form of his own views was inherently mediated by the spirit of his social class in the period around 1800. He was not the spokesman or advocate of this class[...] he was its inborn son. (Adorno 1998: 44 – 45)

Once again, then, the formal nature of Beethoven's music is determined by the socio-historical complex external to his 'purely musical' activity. The appearance of the reprise in Beethoven's work, then, is not simply a contingent choice made by Beethoven alone. It in fact represents the limit of Beethoven's dialectical musical activity, this limit being imposed by the same socio-historical determination which also lends the successful elements of Beethoven's work its socially critical dimension and truth.

This brings to a close this brief examination of Adorno's work on Beethoven. I hope it has served to illustrate how the general methodological remarks made in Chapter 4 can be made to match up with the analysis of a specific artist or artwork.

## **List Of Abbreviations**

ND - *Negative Dialectics*. Translated by E. B. Ashton. Routledge: Abingdon. Theodor Adorno, 2006b.

DE - *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. Edited by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr. Stanford University Press: Stanford, California. Theodor W. Adorno, & Max Horkheimer, 2002.

AT - *Aesthetic Theory*. Translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor. Continuum: London, New York. Theodor W. Adorno, 2004.

MM - *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*. Translated by E. F. N. Jephcott. Verso: London, New York. Theodor Adorno, 2005.

All quotations from *Negative Dialectics* are adapted from both Ashton's original translation and the original German text. All quotations from ND will provide two page references - for the relevant pages in Ashton, and the original German text (Adorno 1997b) , respectively.



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